A MASTER OF FORTUNE

BEING FURTHER ADVENTURES OF CAPTAIN KETTLE

BY
C. CUTCLIFFE HYNE

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ATTIRED IN HIGH RUBBER THIGH BOOTS AND LEATHER-BOUND BLACK OILSKINS.

[*Frontispiece.*

A MASTER... OF FORTUNE

Being Further Adventures of Captain Kettle

BY

CUTCLIFFE HYNE

AUTHOR OF

"CAPTAIN KETTLE," "THE STRONGER HAND," "THE LOST CONTINENT," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY STANLEY L. WOOD

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A Master of Fortune

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER I.

In Quarantine 1

CHAPTER II.

The Little Wooden God with the Eyes . . . 26

CHAPTER III.

A Quick Way with Rebels 50

CHAPTER IV.

The New Republic 78

CHAPTER V.

The Looting of the "Indian Sheriff" . . . 104

CHAPTER VI.

The Wire-milkers 132

CHAPTER VII.

The Derelict 156

CHAPTER VIII.

To Capture an Heiress 183

CHAPTER IX.

A Matter of Justice 210

CHAPTER X.

Dago Divers 236

CHAPTER XI.

The Dear Insured 261

CHAPTER XII.

The Fire and the Farm 290

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

PAGE

Attired in high rubber thigh boots and leather-bound black oilskins . . . . . *Frontispiece*

He came and stood with one foot on Kettle's breast in the attitude of a conqueror 40

The little army could only march in single file . . 95

"You insolent little blackguard, you dare to speak to me like that!" 143

He picked up the man and sent him after the knife . . 175

"I'm a British subject" 205

Out of the middle of these spectators jumped the mild, delicate Hamilton 278

Strangers came up and wrung Kettle's unwilling hand . 309

Dedication

TO CAPTAIN OWEN KETTLE

My dear Kettle,—

With some considerable trepidation, I venture to offer you here the dedication of your unauthorized biography. You will read these memoirs, I know, and it is my pious hope that you do not fit the cap on yourself as their hero. Of course I have sent you along your cruises under the decent disguise of a purser's name, and I trust that if you do recognize yourself, you will appreciate this nice feeling on my part. Believe me, it was not entirely caused by personal fear of that practical form which I am sure your displeasure would take if you caught any one putting you into print. Even a working novelist has his humane moments; and besides if I made you more recognizable, there might be a more dangerous broth stirred up, with an ugly international flavor. Would it be indiscreet to bring one sweltering day in Bahia to your memory, where you made play with a German (or was he a Scandinavian?) and a hundredweight drum of good white lead? or might one hint at that little affair which made Odessa bad for your health, and indeed compelled you to keep away from Black Sea ports entirely for several years? I trust, then, that if you do detect my sin in making myself without leave or license your personal historian, you will be induced for the sake of your present respectability to give no sign of a ruffled temper, but recognize me as part of the cross you are appointed to bear, and incidentally remember my forbearance in keeping so much really splendid material (from my point of view) in snug retirement up my sleeve.

Finally, let me remind you that I made no promises not to publish, and that you did. Not only were you going to endow the world with a book of poems, but I was to have a free copy. This has not yet come; and if, for an excuse, you have published no secular verse, I am quite willing to commute for a copy of the Book of Hymns, provided it is suitably inscribed.

C. J. C. H.

Oak Vale, Bradford,
June 27, 1899.

A MASTER OF FORTUNE

CHAPTER I

IN QUARANTINE

"The pay is small enough," said Captain Kettle, staring at the blue paper. "It's a bit hard for a man of my age and experience to come down to a job like piloting, on eight pound a month and my grub."

"All right, Capt'n," replied the agent. "You needn't tell me what I know already. The pay's miserable, the climate's vile, and the bosses are beasts. And yet we have more applicants for these berths on the Congo than there are vacancies for. And f'why is it, Capt'n? Because there's no questions asked. The Congo people want men who can handle steamers. Their own bloomin' Belgians aren't worth a cent for that, and so they have to get Danes, Swedes, Norwegians, English, Eytalians, or any one else that's capable. They prefer to give small pay, and are willing to take the men that for various reasons can't get better jobs elsewhere. Guess you'll know the crowd I mean?"

"Thoroughly, sir," said Kettle, with a sigh. "There are a very large number of us. But we're not all unfortunate through our own fault."

"No, I know," said the agent. "Rascally owners,

unsympathetic Board of Trade, master's certificate suspended quite unjustly, and all that——" The agent looked at his watch. "Well, Capt'n, now, about this berth? Are you going to take it?"

"I've no other choice."

"Right," said the agent, and pulled a printed form on to the desk before him, and made a couple of entries. "Let's see—er—is there a Mrs. Kettle?"

"Married," said the little sailor; "three children."

The agent filled these details on to the form. "Just as well to put it down," he commented as he wrote. "I'm told the Congo Free State has some fancy new pension scheme on foot for widdys and kids, though I expect it'll come to nothing, as usual. They're a pretty unsatisfactory lot all round out there. Still you may as well have your chance of what plums are going. Yer age, Capt'n?"

"Thirty-eight."

"And—er—previous employment? Well, I suppose we had better leave that blank as usual. They never really expect it to be filled in, or they wouldn't offer such wretchedly small pay and commission. You've got your master's ticket to show, and that's about all they want."

"There's my wife's address, sir. I'd like my half-pay sent to her."

"She shall have it direct from Brussels, skipper, so long as you are alive—I mean, so long as you remain in the Congo Service."

Captain Kettle sighed again. "Shall I have to wait long before this appointment is confirmed?"

"Why, no," said the agent. "There's a boat sailing for the Coast to-morrow, and I can give you an order for a passage by her. Of course my recommendation has to go to Brussels to be ratified,

but that's only a matter of form. They never refuse anybody that offers. They call the Government 'Leopold and Co.' down there on the Congo. You'll understand more about it when you're on the spot.

"I'm sorry for ye, Capt'n, but after what you told me, I'm afraid it's the only berth I can shove you into. However, don't let me frighten ye. Take care of yourself, don't do too much work, and you may pull through all right. Here's the order for the passage down Coast by the Liverpool boat. And now I must ask you to excuse me. I've another client waiting."

* * * * *

In this manner, then, Captain Owen Kettle found himself, after many years of weary knocking about the seas, enlisted into a regular Government service; and although this Government, for various reasons, happened to be one of the most unsatisfactory in all the wide, wide world, he thrust this item resolutely behind him, and swore to himself that if diligence and crew-driving could bring it about, he would rise in that service till he became one of the most notable men in Africa.

"What I want is a competence for the missus and kids," he kept on repeating to himself, "and the way to finger that competence is to get power." He never owned to himself that this thirst for power was one of the greatest curses of his life; and it did not occur to him that his lust for authority, and his ruthless use of it when it came in his way, were the main things which accounted for his want of success in life.

Captain Kettle's voyage down to the Congo on the British and African s.s. *M'poso* gave time for the groundwork of Coast language and Coast thought

(which are like unto nothing else on this planet) to soak into his system. The steamer progressed slowly. She went up rivers protected by dangerous bars; she anchored in roadsteads, off forts, and straggling towns; she lay-to off solitary whitewashed factories, which only see a steamer twice a year, and brought off little doles of cargo in her surf-boats and put on the beaches rubbishy Manchester and Brummagem trade goods for native consumption; and the talk in her was that queer jargon with the polyglot vocabulary in which commerce is transacted all the way along the sickly West African seaboard, from the Goree to St. Paul de Loanda.

Every white man of the *M'poso's* crew traded on his own private account, and Kettle was initiated into the mysteries of the unofficial retail store in the forecastle, of whose existence Captain Image, the commander, and Mr. Balgarnie, the purser, professed a blank and child-like ignorance.

Kettle had come across many types of sea-trader in his time, but Captain Image and Mr. Balgarnie were new to him. But then most of his surroundings were new. Especially was the Congo Free State an organization which was quite strange to him. When he landed at Banana, Captain Nilssen, pilot of the Lower Congo and Captain of the Port of Banana, gave him advice on the subject in language which was plain and unfettered.

"They are a lot of swine, these Belgians," said Captain Nilssen, from his seat in the Madeira chair under the veranda of the pilotage, "and there's mighty little to be got out of them. Here am I, with a wife in Kjobnhavn and another in Baltimore, and I haven't been able to get away to see either of them for five blessed years. And mark you, I'm

a man with luck, as luck goes in this hole. I've been in the lower river pilot service all the time, and got the best pay, and the lightest jobs. There's not another captain in the Congo can say as much. Some day or other they put a steamboat on the ground, and then they're kicked out from the pilot service, and away they're off one-time to the upper river above the falls, to run a launch, and help at the rubber palaver, and get shot at, and collect niggers' ears, and forget what champagne and white man's chop taste like."

"You've been luckier?"

"Some. I've libbed for Lower Congo all my time; had a home in the pilotage here; and got a dash of a case of champagne, or an escribello, or at least a joint of fresh meat out of the refrigerator from every steamboat I took either up or down."

"But then you speak languages?" said Kettle.

"Seven," said Captain Nilssen; "and use just one, and that's English. Shows what a fat lot of influence this État du Congo has got. Why, you have to give orders even to your boat-boys in Coast English if you want to be understood. French has no sort of show with the niggers."

Now white men are expensive to import to the Congo Free State, and are apt to die with suddenness soon after their arrival, and so the State (which is in a chronic condition of hard-up) does not fritter their services unnecessarily. It sets them to work at once so as to get the utmost possible value out of them whilst they remain alive and in the country.

A steamer came in within a dozen hours of Kettle's first stepping ashore, and signalled for a pilot to Boma. Nilssen was next in rotation for duty, and

went off in his boat to board her, and he took with him Captain Owen Kettle to impart to him the mysteries of the great river's navigation.

The boat-boys sang a song explanatory of their notion of the new pilot's personality as they caught at the paddles, but as the song was in Fiote, even Nilssen could only catch up a phrase here and there, just enough to gather the drift. He did not translate, however. He had taken his new comrade's measure pretty accurately, and judged that he was not a man who would accept criticism from a negro. So having an appetite for peace himself, he allowed the custom of the country to go on undisturbed.

The steamer was outside, leaking steam at an anchorage, and sending out dazzling heliograms every time she rolled her bleached awnings to the sun. The pilot's boat, with her crew of savages, paddled towards her, down channels between the mangrove-planted islands. The water spurned up by the paddle blades was the color of beer, and the smell of it was puzzlingly familiar.

"Good old smell," said Nilssen, "isn't it? I see you snuffling. Trying to guess where you met it before, eh? We all do that when we first come. What about crushed marigolds, eh?"

"Crushed marigolds it is."

"Guess you'll get to know it better before you're through with your service here. Well, here we are alongside."

The steamer was a Portuguese, officered by Portuguese, and manned by Krooboys, and the smell of her drowned even the marigold scent of the river. Her dusky skipper exuded perspiration and affability, but he was in a great hurry to get on with his

voyage. The forecastle windlass clacked as the pilot boat drew into sight, heaving the anchor out of the river floor; the engines were restarted so soon as ever the boat hooked on at the foot of the Jacob's ladder; and the vessel was under a full head of steam again by the time the two white men had stepped on to her oily deck.

"When you catch a Portuguese in a hurry like this," said Nilssen to Kettle as they made their way to the awninged bridge, "it means there's something wrong. I don't suppose we shall be told, but keep your eyes open."

However, there was no reason for prying. Captain Rabeira was quite open about his desire for haste. "I got *baccalhao* and passenger boys for a cargo, an' dose don' keep," said he.

"We smelt the fish all the way from Banana," said Nilssen. "Guess you ought to call it stinking fish, not dried fish, Captain. And we can see your nigger passengers. They seem worried. Are you losing 'em much?"

"I done funeral palaver for eight between Loanda an' here, an' dem was a dead loss-a. I don' only get paid for dem dat lib for beach at Boma. Dere was a fire-bar made fast to the leg of each for sinker, an' dem was my dead loss-a too. I don' get paid for fire-bars given to *gastados*——" His English failed him. He shrugged his shoulders, and said "Sabbey?"

"Sabbey plenty," said Nilssen. "Just get me a leadsman to work, Captain. If you're in a hurry, I'll skim the banks as close as I dare."

Rabeira called away a hand to heave the lead, and sent a steward for a bottle of wine and glasses. He even offered camp stools, which, naturally, the

pilots did not use. In fact, he brimmed with affableness and hospitality.

From the first moment of his stepping on to the bridge, Kettle began to learn the details of his new craft. As each sandbar showed up beneath the yellow ripples, as each new point of the forest-clad banks opened out, Nilssen gave him courses and cross bearings, dazing enough to the unprofessional ear, but easily stored in a trained seaman's brain. He discoursed in easy slang of the cut-offs, the currents, the sludge-shallows, the floods, and the other vagaries of the great river's course, and punctuated his discourse with draughts of Rabeira's wine, and comments on the tangled mass of black humanity under the forecastle-head awning.

"There's something wrong with those passenger boys," he kept on repeating. And another time: "Guess those niggers yonder are half mad with funk about something."

But Rabeira was always quick to reassure him. "Now dey lib for Congo, dey not like the idea of soldier-palaver. Dere was nothing more the matter with them but leetle sickness."

"Oh! it's recruits for the State Army you're bringing, is it?" asked Kettle.

"If you please," said Rabeira cheerfully. "Slaves is what you English would call dem. Laborers is what dey call demselves."

Nilssen looked anxiously at his new assistant. Would he have any foolish English sentiment against slavery, and make a fuss? Nilssen, being a man of peace, sincerely hoped not. But as it was, Captain Kettle preserved a grim silence. He had met the low-caste African negro before, and knew that it required a certain amount of coercion to extract

work from him. But he did notice that all the Portuguese on board were armed like pirates, and were constantly on the *qui vive*, and judged that there was a species of coercion on this vessel which would stick at very little.

The reaches of the great beer-colored river opened out before them one after another in endless vistas, and at rare places the white roofs of a factory showed amongst the unwholesome tropical greenery of the banks. Nilssen gave names to these, spoke of their inhabitants as friends, and told of the amount of trade in palm-oil and kernels which each could be depended on to yield up as cargo to the ever-greedy steamers. But the attention of neither of the pilots was concentrated on piloting. The unrest on the forecastle-head was too obvious to be overlooked.

Once, when the cackle of negro voices seemed to point to an immediate outbreak, Rabeira gave an order, and presently a couple of cubical green boxes were taken forward by the ship's Krooboys, broken up, and the square bottles which they contained, distributed to greedy fingers.

"Dashing 'em gin," said Nilssen, looking serious. "Guess a Portugee's in a bad funk before he dashes gin at four francs a dozen to common passenger boys. I've a blame' good mind to put this vessel on the ground—by accident—and go off in the gig for assistance, and bring back a State launch."

"Better not risk your ticket," said Kettle. "If there's a row, I'm a bit useful in handling that sort of cattle myself."

Nilssen eyed wistfully a swirl of the yellow water which hid a sandbar, and, with a sigh, gave the quartermaster a course which cleared it. "Guess

I don't like ructions myself," he said. "Hullo, what's up now? There are two of the passenger boys getting pushed off the forecastle-head by their own friends on to the main deck."

"They look a mighty sick couple," said Kettle, "and their friends seem very frightened. If this ship doesn't carry a doctor, it would be a good thing if the old man were to start in and deal out some drugs."

It seemed that Rabeira was of the same opinion. He went down to the main deck, and there, under the scorching tropical sunshine, interviewed the two sick negroes in person, and afterwards administered to each of them a draught from a blue glass bottle. Then he came up, smiling and hospitable and perspiring, on to the bridge, and invited the pilots to go below and dine. "Chop lib for cabin," said he; "palm-oil chop, plenty-too-much-good. You lib for below and chop. I take dem ship myself up dis next reach."

"Well, it is plain, deep water," said Nilssen, "and I guess you sabbey how to keep in the middle as well as I do. Come along, Kettle."

The pair of them went below to the baking cabin and dined off a savory orange-colored stew, and washed it down with fiery red wine, and dodged the swarming, crawling cockroaches. The noise of angry negro voices came to them between whiles through the hot air, like the distant chatter of apes.

The Dane was obviously ill at ease and frightened; the Englishman, though feeling a contempt for his companion, was very much on the alert himself, and prepared for emergencies. There was that mysterious something in the atmosphere which would have bidden the dullest of mortals prepare for danger.

Up they came on deck again, and on to the bridge. Rabeira himself was there in charge, dark, smiling, affable as ever.

Nilssen looked sharply down at the main deck below. "Hullo," said he, "those two niggers gone already? You haven't shifted them down below, I suppose?"

The Portuguese Captain shrugged his shoulders. "No," he said, "it was bad sickness, an' dey died an' gone over the side. I lose by their passage. I lose also the two fire-bar which I give for funeral palaver. Ver' disappointing."

"Sudden kind of sickness," said Nilssen.

"Dis sickness is. It make a man lib for die in one minute, clock time. But it don' matter to you pilot, does it? You lib for below—off duty—dis las' half hour. You see nothing, you sabby nothing. I don' want no trouble at Boma with doctor palaver. I make it all right for you after. Sabby?"

"Oh, I tumble to what you're driving at, but I was just thinking out how it works. However, you're captain of this ship, and if you choose not to log down a couple of deaths, I suppose it's your palaver. Anyway, I don't want to cause no ill-will, and if you think it's worth a dash, I don't see why I shouldn't earn it. It's little enough we pick up else in this service, and I've got a wife at home in Liverpool who has to be thought about."

Kettle drew a deep breath. "It seems to me," he said, looking very hard at the Portuguese, "that those men died a bit too sudden. Are you sure they were *pukka* dead when you put them over the side?"

"Oh, yes," said Rabeira smilingly, "an' dey made no objection. It was best dey should go over quick.

Bodies do not keep in this heat. An' pilot, I do you square-a, same as with Nilssen. You shall have your dash when doctor-palaver set."

"No," said Kettle, "you may keep it in your own trousers, Captain. Money that you've fingered, is a bit too dirty for me to touch."

"All right," said Rabeira with a genial shrug, "so much cheaper for me. But do not talk on the beach, dere's good boy, or you make trouble-palaver for me."

"I'll shut my head if you stop at this," said Kettle, "but if you murder any more of those poor devils, I'll see you sent to join them, if there's enough law in this State to rig a gallows."

The Portuguese did not get angry. On the contrary, he seemed rather pleased at getting what he wanted without having to bribe for it, and ordered up fresh glasses and another bottle of wine for the pilots' delectation. But this remained untouched. Kettle would not drink himself, and Nilssen (who wished to be at peace with both sides) did not wish to under the circumstances.

To tell the truth, the Dane was beginning to get rather scared of his grim-visaged little companion; and so, to prevent further recurrence to unpleasant topics, he plunged once more into the detail of professional matters. Here was a grassy swamp that was a deep water channel the year before last; there was a fair-way in the process of silting up; there was a mud-bar with twenty-four feet, but steamers drawing twenty-seven feet could scrape over, as the mud was soft. The current round that bend raced at a good eleven knots. That bank below the palm clump was where an Italian pilot stuck the *M'poso* for a month, and got

sent to upper Congo (where he was eaten by some rebellious troops) as a recompense for his blunder.

Almost every curve of the river was remembered by its tragedy, and had they only known it, the steamer which carried them for their observation had hatching within her the germs of a very worthy addition to the series.

More trouble cackled out from the forecastle-head, and more of the green gin cases were handed up to quell it. The angry cries gradually changed to empty boisterous laughter, as the raw potato spirit soaked home; and the sullen, snarling faces melted into grotesque, laughing masks; but withal the carnival was somewhat grisly.

It was clear that more than one was writhing with the pangs of sickness. It was clear also that none of these (having in mind the physicking and fate of their predecessors) dared give way, but with a miserable gaiety danced, and drank, and guffawed with the best. Two, squatting on the deck, played *tom-tom* on upturned tin pans; another jingled two pieces of rusty iron as accompaniment; and all who in that crowded space could find foot room, danced *shuff-shuff-shuffle* with absurd and aimless gestures.

The fort at Chingka drew in sight, with a B. and A. boat landing concrete bags at the end of its wharf; and on beyond, the sparse roofs of the capital of the Free State blistered and buckled under the sun. The steamer, with hooting siren, ran up her gaudy ensign, and came to an anchor in the stream twenty fathoms off the State wharf. A yellow-faced Belgian, with white sun helmet and white umbrella, presently came off in the doctor's boat, and an-

nounced himself as the health officer of the port, and put the usual questions.

Rabeira lied pleasantly and glibly. Sickness he owned to, but when on the word the doctor hurriedly made his boat-boys pull clear, he laughed and assured him that the sickness was nothing more than a little fever, such as any one might suffer from in the morning, and be out, cured, and making merry again before nightfall.

That kind of fever is known in the Congo, and the doctor was reassured, and bade his boat-boys pull up again. Yet because of the evil liver within him, his temper was short, and his questioning acid. But Captain Rabeira was stiff and unruffled and wily as ever, and handed in his papers and answered questions, and swore to anything that was asked, as though care and he were divorced forever.

Kettle watched the scene with a drawn, moist face. He did not know what to do for the best. It seemed to him quite certain that this oily, smiling scoundrel, whom he had more than half suspected of a particularly callous and brutal double murder, would be given *pratique* for his ship, and be able to make his profits unrestrained. The shipmaster's *esprit de corps* prevented him from interfering personally, but he very much desired that the heavens would fall—somehow or other—so that justice might be done.

A *deus ex machina* came to fill his wishes. The barter of words and the conning of documents had gone on; the doctor's doubts were on the point of being lulled for good; and in a matter of another ten seconds *pratique* would have been given. But from the forecastle-head there came a yell, a chatter

of barbaric voices, a scuffle and a scream; a gray-black figure mounted the rail, and poised there a moment, an offence to the sunlight, and then, falling convulsively downwards, hit the yellow water with a smack and a spatter of spray, and sank from sight.

A couple of seconds later the creature reappeared, swimming frenziedly, as a dog swims, and by a swirl of the current (before anybody quite knew what was happening) was swept down against the doctor's boat, and gripped ten bony fingers upon the gunwhale and lifted towards her people a face and shoulders eloquent of a horrible disorder.

Instantly there was an alarm, and a sudden panic. "*Sacre nom d'un pipe*," rapped out the Belgian doctor; "*variole!*"

"Small-pox lib," whimpered his boat-boys, and before their master could interfere, beat at the delirious wretch with their oars. He hung on tenaciously, enduring a perfect avalanche of blows. But mere flesh and bone had to wither under that onslaught, and at last, by sheer weight of battering, he was driven from his hold, and the beer-colored river covered him then and for always.

After that, there was no further doubt of the next move. The yellow-faced doctor sank back exhausted in the stern sheets of the gig, and gave out sentence in gasps. The ship was declared unclean until further notice; she was ordered to take up a berth a mile away against the opposite bank of the river till she was cleared of infection; she was commanded to proceed there at once, to anchor, and then to blow off all her steam.

The doctor's tortured liver prompted him, and he spoke with spite. He called Rabeira every vile name

which came to his mind, and wound up his harangue by rowing off to Chingka to make sure that the guns of the fort should back up his commands.

The Portuguese captain was daunted then; there is no doubt about that. He had known of this outbreak of small-pox for two days, had stifled his qualms, and had taken his own peculiar methods of keeping the disease hidden, and securing money profit for his ship. He had even gone so far as to carry a smile on his dark, oily face, and a jest on his tongue. But this prospect of being shut up with the disorder till it had run its course inside the walls of the ship, and no more victims were to be claimed, was too much for his nerve. He fled like some frightened animal to his room, and deliberately set about guzzling a surfeit of neat spirit.

Nilssen, from the bridge, fearful for his credit with the State, his employer, roared out orders, but nobody attended to them. Mates, quartermasters, Krooboys, had all gone aft so as to be as far as possible from the smitten area; and in the end it was Kettle who went to the forecastle-head, and with his own hands let steam into the windlass and got the anchor. He stayed at his place. An engineer and fireman were still below, and when Nilssen telegraphed down, they put her under weigh again, and the older pilot with his own hands steered her across to the quarantine berth. Then Kettle let go the anchor again, paid out and stoppered the cable, and once more came aft; and from that moment the new *regime* of the steamer may be said to have commenced.

In primitive communities, from time immemorial, the strongest man has become chieftain through sheer natural selection. Societies which have been

upheaved to their roots by anarchy, panic, or any of these more perfervid emotions, revert to the primitive state. On this Portuguese ship, authority was smashed into the smallest atoms, and every man became a savage and was in danger at the hands of his fellow savage.

Rabeira had drunk himself into a stupor before the boilers had roared themselves empty through the escapes. The two mates and the engineers cowered in their rooms as though the doors were a barrier against the small-pox germs. The Krooboys broached cargo and strewed the decks with their half-naked bodies, drunk on gin, amid a litter of smashed green cases.

Meals ceased. The Portuguese cook and steward dropped their collective duties from the first alarm; the Kroo cook left the rice steamer because "steam no more lib"; and any one who felt hunger or thirst on board, foraged for himself, or went without satisfying his wants. Nobody helped the sick, or chided the drunken. Each man lived for himself alone—or died, as the mood seized him.

Nilssen took up his quarters at one end of the bridge, frightened, but apathetic. With awnings he made himself a little canvas house, airy, but sufficient to keep off the dews of night. When he spoke, it was usually to picture the desolation of one or other of the Mrs. Nilssens on finding herself a widow. As he said himself, he was a man of very domesticated notions. He had no sympathy with Kettle's constantly repeated theory that discipline ought to be restored.

"Guess it's the captain's palaver," he would say. "If the old man likes his ship turned into a bear garden, 'tisn't our grub they're wasting, or our

cargo they've started in to broach. Anyway, what can we do? You and I are only on board here as pilots. I wish the ship was in somewhere hotter than Africa, before I'd ever seen her."

"So do I," said Kettle. "But being here, it makes me ill to see the way she's allowed to rot, and those poor beasts of niggers are left to die just as they please. Four more of them have either jumped overboard, or been put there by their friends. The dirt of the place is awful. They're spreading small-pox poison all over the ship. Nothing is ever cleaned."

"There's dysentery started, too."

"Very well," said Kettle, "then that settles it. We shall have cholera next, if we let dirt breed any more. I'm going to start in and make things shipshape again."

"For why?"

"We'll say I'm frightened of them as they are at present, if you like. Will you chip in and bear a hand? You're frightened, too."

"Oh, I'm that, and no error about it. But you don't catch me interfering. I'm content to sit here and take my risks as they come, because I can't help myself. But I go no further. If you start knocking about this ship's company they'll complain ashore, and then where'll you be? The Congo Free State don't like pilots who do more than they're paid for."

"Very well," said Kettle, "I'll start in and take my risks, and you can look on and umpire." He walked deliberately down off the bridge, went to where the mate was dozing against a skylight on the quarter deck, and stirred him into wakefulness with his foot.

"Well?" said the man.

"Turn the hands to, and clean ship."

"What!"

"You hear me."

The mate inquired, with abundant verbal garnishings, by what right Kettle gave the order.

"Because I'm a better man than you. Because I'm best man on board. Do you want proof?"

Apparently the mate did. He whipped out a knife, but found it suddenly knocked out of his hand, and sent skimming like a silver flying fish far over the gleaming river. He followed up the attack with an assault from both hands and feet, but soon discovered that he had to deal with an artist. He gathered himself up at the end of half a minute's interview, glared from two half-shut eyes, wiped the blood from his mouth, and inquired what Kettle wanted.

"You heard my order. Carry it out."

The man nodded, and went away sullenly muttering that his time would come.

"If you borrow another knife," said Kettle cheerfully, "and try any more of your games, I'll shoot you like a crow, and thank you for the chance. You'll go forrard and clean the forecastle-head and the fore main deck. Be gentle with those sick! Second Mate?"

"Si, Señor."

"Get a crew together and clean her up aft here. Do you want any rousing along?"

Apparently the second mate did not. He had seen enough of Captain Kettle's method already to quite appreciate its efficacy. The Krooboys, with the custom of servitude strong on them, soon fell-to when once they were started. The thump of holy-

stones went up into the baking air, and grimy water began to dribble from the scuppers.

With the chief engineer Kettle had another scuffle. But he, too, was eased of the knife at the back of his belt, thumped into submissiveness, and sent with firemen and trimmers to wash paint in the stewy engine-room below, and clean up the rusted iron work. And then those of the passenger boys who were not sick, were turned-to also.

With Captain Rabeira, Kettle did not interfere. The man stayed in his own room for the present, undisturbed and undisturbing. But the rest of the ship's complement were kept steadily to their employment.

They did not like it, but they thought it best to submit. Away back from time unnumbered, the African peoples have known only fear as the governing power, and, from long acclimatization, the Portuguese might almost count as African. This man of a superior race came and set himself up in authority over them, in defiance of all precedent, law, everything; and they submitted with dull indifference. The sweets of freedom are not always appreciated by those who have known the easy luxury of being slaves.

The plague was visibly stayed from almost the very first day that Kettle took over charge. The sick recovered or died; the sound sickened no more; it seemed as though the disease microbes on board the ship were glutted.

A mile away, at the other side of the beer-colored river, the rare houses of Boma sprawled amongst the low burnt-up hills, and every day the doctor with his bad liver came across in his boat under the blinding sunshine to within shouting dis-

tance, and put a few weary questions. The formalities were slack enough. Nilssen usually made the necessary replies (as he liked to keep himself in the doctor's good books), and then the boat would row away.

Nilssen still remained gently non-interferent. He was paid to be a pilot by the État Indépendant du Congo—so he said—and he was not going to risk a chance of trouble, and no possibility of profit, by meddling with matters beyond his own sphere. Especially did he decline to be co-sharer in Kettle's scheme for dealing out justice to Captain Rabeira.

"It is not your palaver," he said, "or mine. If you want to stir up trouble, tell the State authorities when you get ashore. That won't do much good either. They don't value niggers at much out here."

"Nor do I," said Kettle. "There's nothing foolish with me about niggers. But there's a limit to everything, and this snuff-colored Dago goes too far. He's got to be squared with, and I'm going to do it."

"Guess it's your palaver. I've told you what the risks are."

"And I'm going to take them," said Kettle grimly. "You may watch me handle the risks now with your own eyes, if you wish."

He went down off the bridge, walked along the clean decks, and came to where a poor wretch lay in the last stage of small-pox collapse. He examined the man carefully. "My friend," he said at last, "you've not got long for this world, anyway, and I want to borrow your last moments. I suppose you won't like to shift, but it's in a good cause, and anyway you can't object."

He stooped and lifted the loathsome bundle in his arms, and then, in spite of a cry of expostulation from Nilssen, walked off with his burden to Rabeira's room.

The Portuguese captain was in his bunk, trying to sleep. He was sober for the first time for many days, and, in consequence, feeling not a little ill.

Kettle deposited his charge with carefulness on the littered settee, and Rabeira started up with a wild scream of fright and a babble of oaths. Kettle shut and locked the door.

"Now look here," he said, "you've earned more than you'll ever get paid in this life, and there's a tolerably heavy bill against you for the next. It looks to me as if it would be a good thing if you went off there to settle up the account right now. But I'm not going to take upon myself to be your hangman. I'm just going to give you a chance of pegging out, and I sincerely hope you'll take it. I've brought our friend here to be your room mate for the evening. It's just about nightfall now, and you've got to stay with him till daybreak."

"You coward!" hissed the man. "You coward! You coward!" he screamed.

"Think so?" said Kettle gravely. "Then if that's your idea, I'll stay here in the room, too, and take my risks. God's seen the game, and I'll guess He'll hand over the beans fairly."

Perspiration stood in beads on all their faces. The room, the one unclean room of the ship, was full of breathless heat, and stale with the lees of drink. Kettle, in his spruce white drill clothes, stood out against the squalor and the disorder, as a mirror might upon a coal-heap.

The Portuguese captain, with nerves smashed by

his spell of debauch, played a score of parts. First he was aggressive, asserting his rights as a man and the ship's master, and demanding the key of the door. Then he was warlike, till his frenzied attack earned him such a hiding that he was glad enough to crawl back on to the mattress of his bunk. Then he was beseeching. And then he began to be troubled with zoological hauntings, which occupied him till the baking air cooled with the approach of the dawn.

The smitten negro on the settee gave now and then a moan, but for the most part did his dying with quietness. Had Kettle deliberately worked for that purpose, he could not have done anything more calculated to make the poor wretch's last moments happy.

"Oh, Massa!" he kept on whispering, "too-much-fine room. You plenty-much good for let me lib for die heah." And then he would relapse into barbaric chatterings more native to his taste, and fitting to his condition.

Captain Kettle played his parts as nurse and warder with grave attention. He sat perspiring in his shirt sleeves, writing at the table whenever for a moment or two he had a spell of rest; and his screed grew rapidly. He was making verse, and it was under the stress of severe circumstances like these that his Muse served him best.

The fetid air of the room throbbed with heat; the glow from the candle lamp was a mere yellow flicker; and the Portuguese, who cowered with twitching fingers in the bunk, was quite ready to murder him at the slightest opening: it was not a combination of circumstances which would have inspired many men.

Morning came, with a shiver and a chill, and with the first flicker of dawn, the last spark of the negro's life went out. Kettle nodded to the ghastly face as though it had been an old friend. "You seemed to like being made use of," he said. "Well, daddy, I hope you have served your turn. If your skipper hasn't got the plague in his system now, I shall think God's forgotten this bit of Africa entirely."

He stood up, gathered his papers, slung the spruce white drill coat over his arm, and unlocked the door. "Captain Rabeira," he said, "you have my full permission to resume your occupation of going to the deuce your own way." With which parting salutation, he went below to the steamer's bathroom and took his morning tub.

Half an hour passed before he came to the deck again, and Nilssen met him at the head of the companion-way with a queer look on his face. "Well," he said, "you've done it."

"Done what?"

"Scared Rabeira over the side."

"How?"

"He came scampering on deck just now, yelling blue murder, and trying to catch crawly things that weren't there. Guess he'd got jim-jams bad. Then he took it into his head that a swim would be useful, and before any one could stop him, he was over the side."

"Well?"

"He's over the side still," said the Dane drily. "He didn't come to the surface. Guess a crocodile chopped him."

"There are plenty round."

"Naturally. We've been ground baiting pretty

liberally these last few weeks. Well, I guess we are about through with the business now. Not nervous about yourself, eh?"

"No," said Kettle, and touched his cap. "God's been looking on at this gamble, as I told Rabeira last night, and He dealt over the beans the way they were earned."

"That's all right," said Nilssen cheerfully. "When a man keeps his courage he don't get small-pox, you bet."

"Well," said Kettle, "I suppose we'll be fumigated and get a clean bill in about ten days from now, and I'm sure I don't mind the bit of extra rest. I've got a lot of stuff I want to write up. It's come in my head lately, and I've had no time to get it down on paper. I shouldn't wonder but what it makes a real stir some day when it's printed; it's real good stuff. I wonder if that yellow-faced Belgian doctor will live to give us *pratique?*"

"I never saw a man with such a liver on him."

"D'you know," said Kettle, "I'd like that doctor to hang on just for another ten days and sign our bill. He's a surly brute, but I've got to have quite a liking for him. He seems to have grown to be part of the show, just like the crows, and the sun, and the marigold smell, and the crocodiles."

"Oh," said Nilssen, "you're a blooming poet. Come, have a cocktail before we chop."

CHAPTER II.

THE LITTLE WOODEN GOD WITH THE EYES.

The colored Mrs. Nilssen, of Banana, gave the pink gin cocktails a final brisk up with the swizzle-stick, poured them out with accurate division, and handed the tray to Captain Kettle and her husband. The men drank off the appetizer and put down the glasses. Kettle nodded a word of praise for the mixture and thanks to its concoctor, and Mrs. Nilssen gave a flash of white teeth, and then shuffled away off the veranda, and vanished within the bamboo walls of the pilotage.

Nilssen sank back into his long-sleeved Madeira chair, a perfect wreck of a man, and Kettle sat up and looked at him with a serious face. "Look here," he said, "you should go home, or at any rate run North for a spell in Grand Canary. If you fool with this health-palaver any longer, you'll peg out."

The Dane stared wistfully out across the blue South Atlantic waters, which twinkled beyond the littered garden and the sand beach. "Yes," he said, "I'd like well enough to go back to my old woman in Boston again, and eat pork and beans, and hear her talk of culture, and the use of missionaries, and all that good old homey rot; but I guess I can't do that yet. I've got to shake this sickness off me right here, first."

"And I tell you you'll never be a sound man again

so long as you lib for Congo. Take a trip home, Captain, and let the salt air blow the diseases out of you."

"If I go to sea," said the pilot wearily, "I shall be stitched up within the week, and dropped over to make a hole in the water. I don't know whether I'm going to get well anywhere, but if I do, it's right here. Now just hear me. You're the only living soul in this blasted Congo Free State that I can trust worth a cent, and I believe you've got grit enough to get me cured if only you'll take the trouble to do it. I'm too weak to take on the job myself; and, even if I was sound, I reckon it would be beyond my weight. I tell you it's a mighty big contract. But then, as I've seen for myself, you're a man that likes a scuffle."

"You're speaking above my head. Pull yourself together, Captain, and then, perhaps, I'll understand what you want."

Nilssen drew the quinine bottle toward him, tapped out a little hill of feathery white powder into a cigarette paper, rolled it up, and swallowed the dose. "I'm not raving," he said, "or anywhere near it; but if you want the cold-drawn truth, listen here: I'm poisoned. I've got fever on me, too, I'll grant, but that's nothing more than a fellow has every week or so in the ordinary way of business. I guess with quinine, whiskey, and pills, I can smile at any fever in Africa, and have done this last eight years. But it's this poison that gets me."

"Bosh," said Kettle. 'If it was me that talked about getting poisoned, there'd be some sense in it. I know I'm not popular here. But you're a man that's liked. You hit it off with these Belgian

brutes, and you make the niggers laugh. Who wants to poison you?"

"All right," said Nilssen; "you've been piloting on the Congo some six months now, and so of course you know all about it. But let me know a bit better. I've watched the tricks of the niggers hereaway for a good many years now, and I've got a big respect for their powers when they mean mischief."

"Have you been getting their backs up, then?"

"Yes. You've seen that big ju-ju in my room?"

"That foul-looking wooden god with the looking-glass eyes?"

"Just that. I don't know where the preciousness comes in, but it's a thing of great value."

"How did you get hold of it?"

"Well, I suppose if you want to be told flatly, I scoffed it. You see, it was in charge of a passenger boy, who brought it aboard the *M'poso* at Matadi. He landed across by canoe from Vivi, and wanted steamer passage down to Boma by the *M'poso*. I was piloting her, and I got my eye on that ju-ju[1] from the very first. Captain Image and that thief of a purser Balgarnie were after it, too, but as it was a bit of a race between us as to who should get it first, one couldn't wait to be too particular."

"What did you want it for? Did you know it was valuable then?"

"Oh, no! I thought it was merely a white-washed

[1] A ju-ju in West African parlance may be a large carved idol, or merely a piece of rag, or skin, or anything else that the native is pleased to set up as a charm. Ju-ju also means witchcraft. If you poison a man, you put ju-ju on him. If you see anything you do not understand, you promptly set it down as ju-ju. Similarly chop is food, and also the act of feeding. "One-time" is immediately.

carved wood god, and I wanted it just to dash to some steamer skipper who had dashed me a case of fizz or something. You know?"

"Yes, I see. Go on. How did you get hold of it?"

"Why, just went and tackled the passenger-boy and dashed him a case of gin; and when he sobered up again, where was the ju-ju? I got it ashore right enough to the pilotage here in Banana, and for the next two weeks thought it was my ju-ju without further palaver.

"Then up comes a nigger to explain. The passenger-boy who had guzzled the gin was no end of a big duke—witch-doctor, and all that, with a record of about three hundred murders to his tally—and he had the cheek to send a blooming ambassador to say things, and threaten, to try and get the ju-ju back. Of course, if the original sportsman had come himself to make his ugly remarks, I'd soon have stopped his fun. That's the best of the Congo Free State. If a nigger down here is awkward, you can always get him shipped off as a slave—soldier, that is—to the upper river, and take darned good care he never comes back again. And, as a point of fact, I did tip a word to the commandant here and get that particular ambassador packed off out of harm's way. But that did no special good. Before a week was through up came another chap to tackle me. He spoke flatly about pains and penalties if I didn't give the thing up; and he offered money—or rather ivory, two fine tusks of it, worth a matter of twenty pounds, as a ransom—and then I began to open my eyes."

"Twenty pounds for that ju-ju! Why, I've picked up many a one better carved for a shilling."

"Well, this bally thing has value; there's no doubt

about that. But where the value comes in, I can't make out. I've overhauled it times and again, but can't see it's anything beyond the ordinary. However, if a nigger of his own free will offered two big tusks to get the thing back, it stands to reason it's worth a precious sight more than that. So when the second ambassador came, I put the price down at a quarter of a ton of ivory, and waited to get it."

Kettle whistled. "You know how to put on the value," he said. "That's getting on for £400 with ivory at its present rates."

"I was badly in want of money when I set the figure. My poor little wife in Bradford had sent me a letter by the last Antwerp mail saying how hard-up she was, and the way she wrote regularly touched me."

"I don't like it," Kettle snapped.

"What, my being keen about the money?"

"No; your having such a deuce of a lot of wives."

"But I am so very domesticated," said Nilssen. "You don't appreciate how domesticated I am. I can't live as a bachelor anywhere. I always like to have a dear little wife and a nice little home to go to in whatever town I may be quartered. But it's a great expense to keep them all provided for. And besides, the law of most countries is so narrow-minded. One has to be so careful."

Kettle wished to state his views on bigamy with clearness and point, but when he cast his eyes over the frail wreck of a man in the Madeira chair, he forebore. It would not take very much of a jar to send Captain Nilssen away from this world to the Place of Reckoning which lay beyond. And so with

a gulp he said instead: "You're sure it's deliberate poisoning?"

"Quite. The nigger who came here last about the business promised to set ju-ju on me, and I told him to do it and be hanged to him. He was as good as his word. I began to be bad the very next day."

"How's it managed?"

"Don't know. They have ways of doing these things in Africa which we white men can't follow."

"Suspect any one?"

"No. And if you're hinting at Mrs. Nilssen in the pilotage there, she's as staunch as you are, bless her dusky skin. Besides, what little chop I've managed to swallow since I've been bad, I've always got out of fresh unopened tins myself."

"Ah," said Kettle; "I fancied some one had been mixing up finely powdered glass in your chop. It's an old trick, and you don't twig it till the doctors cut you up after you're dead."

"As if I wasn't up to a kid's game like that!" said the sick man with feeble contempt. "No, this is regular ju-ju work, and it's beyond the Belgian doctor here, and it's beyond all other white men. There's only one cure, and that's to be got at the place where the poisoning palaver was worked from."

"And where's that?"

Captain Nilssen nodded down the narrow slip of sand, and mangroves, and nut palms, on which the settlement of Banana is built, and gazed with his sunken eyes at the smooth, green slopes of Africa beyond. "Dem village he lib for bush," he said.

"Up country village, eh? They're a nice lot in at the back there, according to accounts. But can't you arrange it by your friend the ambassador?"

"He's not the kind of fool to come back. He's man enough to know he'd get pretty well dropped on if I could get him in my reach again."

"Then tell the authorities here, and get some troops sent up."

"What'd be the good of that? They might go, or they mightn't. If they did, they'd do a lot of shooting, collect a lot of niggers' ears, steal what there was to pick up, and then come back. But would they get what I want out of the witch-doctor? Not much. They'd never so much as see the beggar. He'd take far too big care of his mangy hide. He wouldn't stop for fighting-palaver. He'd be off for bush, one-time. No, Kettle, if I'm to get well, some white man will have to go up by his lonesome for me, and square that witch-doctor by some trick of the tongue."

"Which is another way of saying you want me to risk my skin to get you your prescription?"

"But, my lad, I won't ask you to go for nothing. I don't suppose you are out here on the Congo just for your health. You've said you've got a wife at home, and I make no doubt you're as fond of her and as eager to provide for her as I am for any of mine. Well and good. Here's an offer. Get me cured, and I'll dash you the ju-ju to make what you can out of it."

Kettle stretched out his fingers. "Right," he said. "We'll trade on that." And the pair of them shook hands over the bargain.

It was obvious, if the thing was to be done at all, it must be set about quickly. Nilssen was an utter wreck. Prolonged residence in this pestilential Congo had sapped his constitution; the poison was

constantly eating at him; and he must either get relief in a very short time, or give up the fight and die. So that same afternoon saw Kettle journeying in a dug-out canoe over the beer-colored waters of the river, up stream, toward the witch-doctor's village.

Two savages (one of them suffering from a bad attack of yaws) propelled the craft from her forward part in erratic zig-zags; amidships sat Captain Kettle in a Madeira chair under a green-lined white umbrella; and behind him squatted his personal attendant, a Krooboy, bearing the fine old Coast name of Brass Pan. The crushed marigold smell from the river closed them in, and the banks crept by in slow procession.

The main channels of the Congo Kettle knew with a pilot's knowledge; but the canoe-men soon left these, and crept off into winding backwaters, with wire-rooted mangroves sprawling over the mud on their banks, and strange whispering beast-noises coming from behind the thickets of tropical greenery. The sun had slanted slow; ceibas and silk-cotton woods threw a shade dark almost as twilight; but the air was full of breathless heat, and Kettle's white drill clothes hung upon him clammy and damp. Behind him, in the stern of the canoe, Brass Pan scratched himself plaintively.

Dark fell and the dug-out was made fast to a mangrove root. The Africans covered their heads to ward off ghosts, and snored on the damp floor of the canoe. Kettle took quinine and dozed in the Madeira chair. Mists closed round them, white with damp, earthy-smelling with malaria. Then gleams of morning stole over the trees and made the mists visible, and Kettle woke with a seaman's

promptitude. He roused Brass Pan, and Brass Pan roused the canoe-men, and the voyage proceeded.

Through more silent waterways the clumsy dug-out made her passage, where alligators basked on the mudbanks and sometimes swam up from below and nuzzled the sides of the boat, and where velvety black butterflies fluttered in dancing swarms across the shafts of sunlight; and at last her nose was driven on to a bed of slime, and Kettle was invited to "lib for beach."

Brass Pan stepped dutifully over the mud, and Captain Kettle mounted his back and rode to dry ground without as much as splashing the pipeclay on his dainty canvas shoes. A bush path opened out ahead of them, winding, narrow, uneven, and the man with the yaws went ahead and gave a lead.

As a result of exposure to the night mists of the river, Captain Kettle had an attack of fever on him which made him shake with cold and burn with heat alternately. His head was splitting, and his skin felt as though it had been made originally to suit a small boy, and had been stretched to near bursting-point to serve its present wearer.

In the forest, the path was a mere tunnel amongst solid blocks of wood and greenery; in the open beyond, it was a slim alley between grass-blades eight feet high; and the only air which nourished them as they marched was hot enough to scorch the lungs as it was inhaled. And if in addition to all this, it be remembered that the savages he was going to visit were practising cannibals, were notoriously treacherous, were violently hostile to all whites (on account of many cruelties bestowed by Belgians), and were especially exasperated against

the stealer of their idol, it will be seen that from an ordinary point of view Captain Kettle's mission was far from appetizing.

The little sailor, however, carried himself as jauntily as though he were stepping out along a mere pleasure parade, and hummed an air as he marched. In ordinary moments I think his nature might be described as almost melancholy; it took times of stress like these to thoroughly brighten him.

The path wound, as all native paths do wind, like some erratic snake amongst the grasses, reaching its point with a vast disregard for distance expended on the way. It led, with a scramble, down the sides of ravines; it drew its followers up steep rock-faces that were baked almost to cooking heat by the sun; and finally, it broke up into fan-shape amongst decrepit banana groves, and presently ended amongst a squalid collection of grass and wattle huts which formed the village.

Dogs announced the arrival to the natives, and from out of the houses bolted men, women, and children, who dived out of sight in the surrounding patches of bush.

The man with the yaws explained: "Dem Belgians make war-palaver often. People plenty much frightened. People think we lib for here on war-palaver."

"Silly idiots!" said Captain Kettle. "Hullo, by James! here's a white man coming out of that chimbeque!"

"He God-man. Lib for here on gin-palaver."

"Trading missionary, is he? Bad breed that. And the worst of it is, if there's trouble, he'll hold up his cloth, and I can't hit him." He advanced toward the white man, and touched his helmet. "*Bon jour, Monsieur.*"

"Howdy?" said the missionary. "I'm as English as yourself—or rather Amurrican. Know you quite well by sight, Captain. Seen you on the steamers when I was stationed at our headquarters in Boma. What might you be up here for?"

"I've a bit of a job on hand for Captain Nilssen of Banana."

"Old Cappie Nilssen? Know him quite well. Married him to that Bengala wife of his, the silly old fool. Well, captain, come right into my chimbeque, and chop."

"I'll have some quinine with you, and a cocktail. Chop doesn't tempt me just now. I've a dose of fever on hand."

"Got to expect that here, anyway," said the missionary. "I haven't had fever for three days now, but I'm due for another dose to-morrow afternoon. Fever's quite regular with me. It's a good thing that, because I can fit in my business accordingly."

"I suppose the people at home think you carry the Glad Tidings only?"

"The people at home are impracticable fools, and I guess when I was 'way back in Boston I was no small piece of a fool too. I was sent out here 'long with a lot more tenderfeet to plant beans for our own support, and to spread the gospel for the glory of America. Well, the other tenderfeet are planted, and I'm the only one that's got any kick left. The beans wouldn't grow, and there was no sort of living to be got out of spreading a gospel which nobody seemed to want. So I had to start in and hoe a new row for myself."

"Set up as a trader, that is?"

"You bet. It's mostly grist that comes to me:

palm-oil, rubber, kernels, and ivory. Timber I haven't got the capital to tackle, and I must say the ivory's more to figure about than finger. But I've got the best connection of any trader in gin and guns and cloth in this section, and in another year I'll have made enough of a pile to go home, and I guess there are congregations in Boston that'll just jump at having a returned Congo missionary as their minister."

"I should draw the line at that, myself," said Kettle stiffly.

"Dare say. You're a Britisher, and therefore you're a bit narrow-minded. We're a vury adaptable nation, we Amurricans. Say, though, you haven't told me what you're up here for yet? I guess you haven't come just in search of health?"

Captain Kettle reflected. His gorge rose at this man, but the fellow seemed to have some sort of authority in the village, and probably he could settle the question of Nilssen's ailment with a dozen words. So he swallowed his personal resentment, and, as civilly as he could, told the complete tale as Nilssen had given it to him.

The trader missionary's face grew crafty as he listened. "Look here, you want that old sinner Nilssen cured?"

"That's what I came here for."

"Well, then, give me the ju-ju, and I'll fix it up for you."

"The ju-ju's to be my fee," said Kettle. "I suppose you know something about it? You're not the kind of man to go in for collecting valueless curiosities."

"Nop. I'm here on the make, and I guess you're about the same. But I wouldn't be in your shoes

if the people in the village get to know that you've a finger in looting their idol."

"Why?"

"Oh, you'll die rather painfully, that's all. Better give the thing up, Captain, and let me take over the contract for you. It's a bit above your weight."

Kettle's face grew grim. "Is it?" he said. "Think I'm going to back down for a tribe of nasty, stinking, man-eating niggers? Not much."

"Well," said the missionary, "don't get ruffled. I've got no use for quarrelling. Go your way, and if things turn out ugly don't say I didn't give you the straight cinch, as one white man to another in a savage country. And now, it's about my usual time for siesta."

"Right," said Kettle. "I'll siesta too. My fever's gone now, and I'm feeling pretty rocky and mean. Sleep's a grand pick-me-up."

They took off their coats, and lay down then under filmy mosquito bars, and presently sleep came to them. Indeed, to Kettle came so dead an unconsciousness that he afterward had a suspicion (though it was beyond proof) that some drug had been mixed with his drink. He was a man who at all times was extraordinarily watchful and alert. Often and often during his professional life his bare existence had depended on the faculty for scenting danger from behind the curtain of sleep; and his senses in this direction were so abnormally developed as to verge at times on the uncanny. Cat-like is a poor word to describe his powers of vigilance.

But there is no doubt that in this case his alertness was dulled. The fatigue of the march, his dose of fever, his previous night of wakefulness in the canoe, all combined to undermine his guard; and,

moreover, the attack of the savages was stealthy in the extreme. Like ghosts, they must have crept back from the bush to reconnoitre their village; like daylight ghosts, they must have surrounded the trader missionary's hut and peered at the sleeping man between the bamboos of the wall, and then made their entrance; and it must have been with the quickness of wild beasts that they made their spring.

Kettle woke on the instant that he was touched, and started to struggle for his life, as indeed he had struggled many a time before. But the numbers of the blacks put effective resistance out of the question. Four of them pressed down each arm on to the bed, four each leg, three pressed on his head. Their animal faces champed and gibbered at him; the animal smell of them made him splutter and cough.

Captain Kettle was not a man who often sought help from others; he was used to playing a lone-handed fight against a mob; but the suddenness of the attack, the loneliness of his surroundings, and the dejection due to his recent dose of fever, for the first instant almost unnerved him, and on the first alarm he sang out lustily for the missionary's help. There was no answer. With a jerk he turned his head, and saw that the other bed was empty. The man had left the hut.

For a time the captive did not actively resist further. In a climate like that of the Congo one's store of physical strength is limited, and he did not wish to earn unnecessarily severe bonds by wasting it. As it was, he was tied up cruelly enough with grass rope, and then taken from the hut and flung down under the blazing sunshine outside.

Presently a fantastic form danced up from behind

one of the huts, daubed with colored clays, figged out with a thousand tawdry charms, and cinctured round the middle by a girdle of half-picked bones. He wafted an evil odor before him as he advanced, and he came up and stood with one foot on Kettle's breast in the attitude of a conqueror.

This was the witch-doctor, a creature who held power of life and death over all the village, whom the villagers suffered to test them with poison, to put them to unnamable tortures, to rob them as he pleased,—to be, in fact, a kind of insane autocrat working any whim that seized him freely in their midst. The witch-doctor's power of late had suffered. The white man Nilssen had "put bigger ju-ju" on him, and under its influence had despoiled him of valuable property. Now was his moment of counter triumph. The witch-doctor stated that he brought this other white man to the village by the power of his spells; and the villagers believed him. There was the white man lying on the ground before them to prove it.

Remained next to see what the witch-doctor would do with his captive.

The man himself was evidently at a loss, and talked, and danced, and screamed, and foamed, merely to gain time. He spoke nothing but Fiote, and of that tongue Kettle knew barely a single word. But presently the canoe-man with the yaws was dragged up, and, in his own phrase, was bidden to act as "linguister."

"He say," translated the man with the yaws, "if dem big ju-ju lib back for here, he let you go."

"And if not?"

The interpreter put a question, and the witch-doctor screamed out a long reply, and then stooped

HE CAME AND STOOD WITH ONE FOOT ON KETTLE'S BREAST IN THE ATTITUDE OF A CONQUEROR.

[*Page* 40.

and felt the captive over with his fingers, as men feel cattle at a fair.

"Well?" said Kettle impatiently; "if he doesn't get back the wooden god, let's hear what the game is next?"

"Me no sabbey. He say you too small and thin for chop."

Captain Kettle's pale cheeks flushed, Curiously enough it never occurred to him to be grateful for this escape from a cannibal dinner-table. But his smallness was a constant sore to him, and he bitterly resented any allusion to it.

"Tell that stinking scarecrow I'll wring his neck for him before I'm quit of this village."

"Me no fit," said the linguister candidly. "He kill me now if I say that, same's he kill you soon."

"Oh, he's going to kill me, is he?"

The interpreter nodded emphatically. "Or get dem big ju-ju," he added.

"Ask him how Cappie Nilssen can be cured."

The man with the yaws put the question timidly enough, and the witch-doctor burst into a great guffaw of laughter. Then after a preliminary dance, he took off a little packet of leopard skin, which hung amongst his other charms, and stuffed it deep inside Kettle's shirt.

The interpreter explained: "Him say he put ju-ju on Cappie Nilssen, and can take it off all-e-same easy. Him say you give Cappie Nilssen dis new ju-ju for chop, an' he live for well one-time."

"He doesn't make much trouble about giving it me, anyway," Kettle commented. "Looks as if he felt pretty sure he'd get that idol, or else take the change out of my skin." But, all the same, when the question was put to him again as to whether

he would surrender the image, he flatly refused. There was a certain pride about Kettle which forbade him to make concessionary treaties with an inferior race.

So forthwith, having got this final refusal, the blacks took him up again, and under the witch-doctor's lead carried him well beyond the outskirts of the village. There was a cleared space here, and on the bare, baked earth they laid him down under the full glare of the tropical sunshine. For a minute or so they busied themselves with driving four stout stakes into the ground, and then again they took him up, and made him fast by wrists and ankles, spread-eagle fashion, to the stakes.

At first he was free to turn his head, and with a chill of horror he saw he was not the first to be stretched out in that clearing. There were three other sets of stakes, and framed in each was a human skeleton, picked clean. With a shiver he remembered travellers' tales on the steamers of how these things were done. But then the blacks put down other stakes so as to confine his head in one position, and were proceeding to prop open his mouth with a piece of wood, when suddenly there seemed to be a hitch in the proceedings.

The witch-doctor asked for honey—Kettle recognized the native word—and none was forthcoming. Without honey they could not go on, and the captive knew why. One man was going off to fetch it, but then news was brought that the Krooboy Brass Pan had been caught, and the whole gang of them went off helter-skelter toward the village—and again Kettle knew the reason for their haste.

So there he was left alone for the time being with his thoughts, lashed up beyond all chance of

escape, scorched by an intolerable sun, bitten and gnawed by countless swarms of insects, without chance of sweeping them away. But this was ease compared with what was to follow. He knew the fate for which he was apportioned, a common fate amongst the Congo cannibals. His jaws would be propped open, a train of honey would be led from his mouth to a hill of driver ants close by, and the savage insects would come up and eat him piecemeal while he still lived.

He had seen driver ants attack a house before, swamp fires lit in their path by sheer weight of numbers, put the inhabitants to flight, and eat everything that remained. And here, in this clearing, if he wanted further proof of their power, were the three picked skeletons lying stretched out to their stakes.

There are not many men who could have preserved their reason under monstrous circumstances such as these, and I take it that there is no man living who dare up and say that he would not be abominably frightened were he to find himself in such a plight. In these papers I have endeavored to show Captain Owen Kettle as a brave man, indeed the bravest I ever knew; but I do not think even he would blame me if I said he was badly scared then.

He heard noises from the village which he could not see beyond the grass. He heard poor Brass Pan's death-shriek; he heard all the noises that followed, and knew their meaning, and knew that he was earning a respite thereby; he even heard from over the low hills the hoot of a steamer's siren as she did her business on the yellow waters of the Congo, in crow flight perhaps not a good rifle-shot from where he lay stretched.

It seemed like a fantastic dream to be assured in this way that there were white men, civilized white men, men who could read books and enjoy poetry, sitting about swearing and drinking cocktails under a decent steamer's awnings close by this barbaric scene of savagery. And yet it was no dream. The flies that crept into his nose and his mouth and his eye-sockets, and bit him through his clothing, and the hateful sounds from the village assured him of all its reality.

The blazing day burnt itself to a close, and night came hard upon its heels, still baking and breathless. The insects bit worse than ever, and once or twice Kettle fancied he felt the jaws of a driver ant in his flesh, and wondered if news would be carried to the horde in the ant-hill, which would bring them out to devour their prey without the train of honey being laid to lure them. Moreover, fever had come on him again, and with one thing and another it was only by a constant effort of will that he prevented himself from giving way and raving aloud in delirium.

It was under these circumstances, then, that the missionary came to him again, and once more put in a bid for the ju-ju which lay at the pilotage. Kettle roundly accused the man of having betrayed him, and the fellow did not deny it with any hope of being believed. He had got to get his pile somehow, so he said: the ju-ju had value, and if he could not get hold of it one way, he had to work it another. And finally, would Kettle surrender it then, or did he want any more discomfort.

Now I think it is not to the little sailor's discredit to confess that he surrendered without terms forth-

with. "The thing's yours for when you like to fetch it," he snapped out ungraciously enough, and the missionary at once stooped and cut the grass ropes, and set to chafing his wrists and ankles. "And now," he said, "clear out for your canoe at the river-side for all you're worth, Captain. There's a big full moon, and you can't miss the way."

"Wait a bit," said Kettle. "I'm remembering that I had an errand here. Can you give me the right physic to pull Captain Nilssen round?"

"You have it in that leopard-skin parcel inside your shirt. I saw the witch-doctor give it you."

"Oh! you were looking on, were you?"

"Yes."

"By James! I've a big mind to leave my marks on you, you swine!"

The trader missionary whipped out a revolver. "Guess I'm heeled, sonny. You'd better go slow. You'd——"

There was a rush, a dodge, a scuffle, a bullet whistling harmlessly up into the purple night, and that revolver was Captain Kettle's.

"The cartridges you have in your pocket."

"I've only three. Here they are, confound you! Now, what are you going to do next? You've waked the village. You'll have them down on you in another moment. Run, you fool, or they'll have you yet."

"Will they?" said Kettle. "Well, if you want to know, I've got poor old Brass Pan to square up for yet. I liked that boy." And with that, he set off running down a path between the walls of grasses.

A negro met him in the narrow cut, yelled with surprise, and turned. He dropped a spear as he turned, and Kettle picked it up and drove the blade

between his shoulder-blades as he ran. Then on through the village he raged like a man demented. With what weapons he fought he never afterward remembered. He slew with whatever came to his hand. The villagers, wakened up from their torpid sleep, rushed from the grass and wattle houses on every hand. Kettle in his Berserk rage charged them whenever they made a stand, till at last all fled from him as though he were more than human.

Bodies lay upon the ground staring up at the moon; but there were no living creatures left, though the little sailor, with bared teeth and panting breath, stood there waiting for them. No; he had cleared the place, and only one other piece of retribution lay in his power. The embers of a great fire smouldered in the middle of the clearing, and with a shudder (as he remembered its purpose) he shovelled up great handfuls of the glowing charcoal and sowed it broadcast on the dry grass roofs of the chimbeques. The little crackling flames leaped up at once; they spread with the quickness of a gunpowder train; and in less than a minute a great cataract of fire was roaring high into the night.

Then, and not till then, did Captain Kettle think of his own retreat. He put the three remaining cartridges into the empty chambers of his revolver, and set off at a jog-trot down the winding path by which he had come up from the river.

His head was throbbing then, and the stars and the grasses swam before his eyes. The excitement of the fight had died away—the ills of the place gripped every fibre of his body. Had the natives ambushed him along the path, I do not think he could possibly have avoided them. But those na-

tives had had their lesson, and they did not care to tamper with Kettle's *ju-ju* again. And so he was allowed to go on undisturbed, and somehow or other he got down to the river-bank and the canoe.

He did not do the land journey at any astonishing pace. Indeed, it is a wonder he ever got over it at all. More than once he sank down half unconscious in the path, and up all the steeper slopes he had to crawl animal fashion on all-fours. But by daybreak he got to the canoe, and pushed her off, and by a marvellous streak of luck lost his way in the inner channels, and wandered out on to the broad Congo beyond.

I say this was a streak of luck, because by this time consciousness had entirely left him, and on the inner channels he would merely have died, and been eaten by alligators, whereas, as it was, he got picked up by a State launch, and taken down to the pilotage at Banana.

It was Mrs. Nilssen who tediously nursed him back to health. Kettle had always been courteous to Mrs. Nilssen, even though she was as black and polished as a patent leather boot; and Mrs. Nilssen appreciated Captain Owen Kettle accordingly.

With Captain Nilssen, pilot of the lower Congo, Kettle had one especially interesting talk during his convalescence. "You may as well take that troublesome wooden god for yourself now," said Nilssen. "But, if I were you, I'd ship it home out of harm's way by the next steamer."

"Hasn't that missionary brute sent for it yet?"

Captain Nilssen evaded the question. "I'll never forget what you've done for me, my lad. When you were brought in here after they picked you up, you looked fit to peg out one-time, but the only sane

thing you could do was to waggle out a little leopard-skin parcel, and bid me swallow the stuff that was inside. You'd started out to get me that physic, and, by gum, you weren't happy till I got it down my neck."

"Well, you look fit enough now."

"Never better."

"But about the missionary brute?"

"Well, my lad, I suppose you're well enough to be told now. He's got his trading cut short for good. That nigger with the yaws who paddled you up brought down the news. The beggars up there chopped him, and I'm sure I hope he didn't give them indigestion."

"My holy James!"

"Solid. His missionary friends here have written home a letter to Boston which would have done you good to see. According to them, the man's a blessed martyr, nothing more or less. The gin and the guns are left clean out of the tale; and will Boston please send out some more subscriptions, one-time? You'll see they'll stick up a stained-glass window to that joker in Boston, and he'll stand up there with a halo round his head as big as a frying-pan. And, oh! won't his friends out here be resigned to his loss when the subscriptions begin to hop in from over the water."

"Well, there's been a lot of trouble over a trumpery wooden idol. I fancy we'd better burn it out of harm's way."

"Not much," said Nilssen with a sigh. "I've found out where the value comes in, and as you've earned them fairly and squarely, the dividends are yours to stick to. One of those looking-glass eyes was loose, and I picked it out. There was a bit of

green glass behind. I picked out the other eye, and there was a bit of green glass at the back of that too."

"Oh, the niggers'll use anything for ju-ju."

"Wait a bit. I'd got my notions as to what that green glass was, and so I toted them in my pocket up and down the river and asked every man who was likely to know a jewel what he thought. They aren't green glass at all. They're emeralds. They're come from the Lord knows where, but that doesn't matter. They're worth fifty pounds apiece at the very lowest, and they're yours, my lad, to do what you like with."

Captain Kettle lay back on his pillow and smiled complacently. "That money'll just set up my Missis nicely in a lodging-house. Now I can go on with my work here, and know that whatever happens she and the kids are provided for."

"Eh, well," said Nilssen with a sigh, "she'll be nicely fixed up now. I wish I could make provision like that for my old women."

4

CHAPTER III.

A QUICK WAY WITH REBELS.

Another bullet came silently up out of the distance, and the nigger second engineer of the launch gave a queer little whimper and fell down *flop*, and lay with his flat nose nuzzling the still warm boiler. A hole, which showed up red and angry against the black wool just underneath his grass cap, made the diagnosis of his injury an easy matter.

The noise of the shot came to them quite a long time afterward, when the little puff of smoke which had spirted up from the distant sandbank had already begun to thin under the sunshine; but it was that gun-crack, and not the sight of the dead engineer, which gave the working negroes their final scare. With loud children's cries, and queer dodgings of fear, they pitched down their working tools, and fled to where the other black soldiers and passengers were lying on the iron floor-plates of the launch, in security below her water-line.

The Belgian Commandant, from his shelter at the other side of the boiler, swore volubly, and Clay, the English doctor, laughed and twanged out a music-hall tune on his banjo. Kettle, intent on getting his vessel once more under command, was for driving the negro crew back to their work by the simple methods peculiar to the British merchant officer. But this Commandant Balliot forbade, and,

as he was Kettle's superior in the Congo Free State service, that small mariner had (very much against his grain) to obey.

"We shall have these fellows rebelling next," said the Commandant, "if you push them too hard; and if they join the rest, where shall we be?"

"There are a thousand of your troops in the mutiny already, according to your tally," said Kettle stiffly, "and I don't see that if this hundred joined them it would make much difference to us, one way or the other. Besides," he added, almost persuasively, "if I had the handling of them they would not join the others. They would stay here and do as they were told."

"Captain Kettle," snapped the Commandant, "you have heard my orders. If I have any more of this hectoring spirit from you, I shall report your conduct when we get back to Stanley Pool."

"You may report till you're black in the face," said Kettle truculently; "but if you don't put a bit more backbone into things, you'll do it as a ghost and not as a live man. Look at your record up to date. You come up here at the head of a fine expedition; you set your soldiers to squeeze the tribes for rubber and ivory; they don't bring in enough niggers' ears to show that they've used their cartridges successfully, and so you shoot them down in batches; and then you aren't man enough to keep your grip on them, but when they've had enough of your treatment, they just start in and rebel."

"One man can't fight a thousand."

"You can't, anyway. If the Doc and I had turned up with this launch half an hour later, your excellent troops would have knocked you on the head and chopped you afterward. But I'd like to remind

you that we ran in-shore and took you away in spite of their teeth."

"You are very brave," sneered the Commandant, "you and Monsieur le Docteur."

"Well, you see," said Kettle with cheerful insult, "our grandfathers didn't run away at Waterloo, and that gives us something to go upon."

"I put you under arrest," screamed the Belgian. "I will have satisfaction for this later. I——"

"Steady on," said Clay, with a yawn. He put down his banjo, stretched, and stood up. Behind him the bullets pattered merrily against the iron plating. "Why on earth do you two keep on nagging? Look at me—I'm half drunk as usual, and I'm as happy as a lord. Take a peg, each of you, and sweeten your tempers."

They glared at him from each side.

"Now it's not the least use either of you two trying to quarrel with me. We might as well all be friends together for the little time we've got. We've a good deal in common: we're all bad eggs, and we're none of us fit for our billets. Monsieur le Commandant, you were a sous-officier in Belgium who made Brussels too hot to hold you; you come out here, and you're sent to govern a district the size of Russia, which is a lot beyond your weight.

"Friend Kettle, you put a steamer on the ground in the lower Congo; you probably had a bad record elsewhere, or you'd never have drifted to the Congo service at all; and now you're up here on the Haut Congo skippering a rubbishy fourpenny stern-wheel launch, which of course is a lot beneath your precious dignity.

"And I—well, I once had a practice at home; and

got into a row over a woman; and when the row was through, well, where was the practice? I came out here because no one will look at me in any other quarter of the globe. I get wretched pay, and I do as little as I possibly can for it. I'm half-seas over every day of the week, and I'm liked because I can play the banjo."

"I don't see what good you're getting by abuse like this," said Kettle.

"I'm trying to make you both forget your silly naggling. We may just as well be cheerful for the bit of time we've got."

"Bit of time!"

"Well, it won't be much anyway. Here's the launch with a hole shot in her boiler, and no steam, drifted hard and fast on to a sandbank. On another bank, eight hundred yards away, are half a regiment of rebel troops with plenty of good rifles and plenty of cartridges, browning us for all they're worth. Their friends are off up stream to collect canoes from those villages which have been raided, and canoes they'll get—likewise help from the recently raided. When dark comes, away they'll attack us, and personally, I mean to see it out fighting, and they'll probably chop me afterward, and the odds are I give some of them bad dyspepsia. About that I don't care two pins. But I don't intend to be caught alive. That means torture, and no error about it." He shivered. "I've seen their subjects after they've played their torture games on them. My aunt, but they were a beastly sight."

The Commandant shivered also. He, too, knew what torture from the hands of those savage Central African blacks meant.

"I should blow up the launch with every soul on

board of her," he said, "if I thought there was any chance of their boarding with canoes."

"Well, you can bet your life they'll try it," said Kettle, "if we stay here."

"But how can we move? We can't make steam. And if we do push off this bank, we shall drift on to the next bank down stream."

"That's your idea," said Kettle. "Haven't you got a better?"

"You must not speak to me like that," said Balliot, with another little snap of dignity and passion. "I'm your senior officer."

"At the present rate you'll continue to be that till about nightfall," said Kettle unpleasantly, "after which time we shall be killed, one way or another, and our ranks sorted out afresh."

"Now, you two," said Clay, "don't start wrangling again." He took a bottle out of a square green case, and passed it. "Here, have some gin."

"For God's sake, Doc, dry up," said Kettle, "and pull yourself together, and remember you're a blooming Englishman."

Clay's thin yellow cheeks flushed. "What's the use?" he said with a forced laugh. "'Tisn't as if anybody wanted to see any of us home again."

"I'm wanted," said Kettle, sharply, "by my wife and kids. I've got them to provide for, and I'm not going to shirk doing it. Let me have my own way, and I can get out of this mess; yes, and out of a dozen worse messes on beyond it. The thing's nothing if only it's tackled the right way."

"How shall you set about it," asked the Commandant.

"By giving orders, and taking mighty big care that everybody on this ship carries them out."

Commandant Balliot rubbed at his close, scrubby beard, and bared his teeth viciously. Behind him, from the distant sandbank, the rebel bullets rapped unceasingly at the launch's iron plating. "But I am the senior in rank," he repeated again. "Officially I could not resign the command in your favor."

"Yes, I know. But here's the situation packed small: if you climb up, and do the large, and perch on your blessed rank, we shall probably see this day out, but we certainly sha'n't see another in. You're at the end of your string, and you can't deny it."

"But if you've a suggestion to make which will save us, make it, and I will act."

"No," snapped Kettle. "I'll either be boss and carry out my schemes my own way; or else, if we stay on as we are, I hold my tongue, and you can go on and arrange the funeral."

"If you can get us out of this mess——"

"I've said I can."

"Then I will let you take the command."

"Well and good. In the first place——"

"Wait a minute. I resign to you temporarily; but, understand, even if I wished to, I could not do this officially. When we get down to Leopoldville—when we get down to the next post even——"

"Oh, you can collar the blooming credit," said Kettle contemptuously, "when we do get clear away to any of your own headquarters. I'm not looking for gratitude either from a Belgian or from the Congo Free State. They don't like Englishmen."

"You are not a lovable nation," said Commandant Balliot spitefully.

"Now," said Kettle, thrusting his fierce little face

close up to the other, "understand once and for all that I will not have England abused, neither do I take any more of your lip for myself. I'm Captain of the whole of this show now, by your making, and I intend to be respected as such, and hold a full captain's ticket. You'll call me 'sir' when you speak, and you'll take orders civilly and carry them out quick, or, by James! you'll find your teeth rammed down your throat in two twinkles of a handspike. Savvy that?"

The man of the weaker nation subsided. There was no law and order here to fall back upon. There was nothing but unnerving savagery and vastness. The sandbar where their wrecked launch lay was out in the middle of the Congo, perhaps eight miles from the park-like lands which stretched indefinitely beyond either bank. The great river astern of her glared like a mirror under the intolerable sunshine; came up and swirled around her flanks in yellow, marigold-smelling waves; and then joined up into mirror shape again till the eye ached in regarding it. The baking sky above was desolate even of clouds; there was no help anywhere; and on another distant sandbank, where here and there little bushes of powder smoke sprouted up like a gauzy foliage, a horde of barbarous blacks lusted to tear out his life.

In Commandant Balliot's own heart hope was dead. But it seemed that this detestable Englishman had schemes in his head by which their lives might yet be saved.

He had been given a sample of the Englishmen's brazen daring already. After his troops mutinied, and pandemonium reigned in the village where he was quartered, the Englishman had steamed up

with his paltry stern-wheel launch, and by sheer dash and recklessness had carried him and his last parcel of faithful men away in spite of the mutineers' teeth.

It was an insane thing to do, and when he had (as senior officer) complimented Kettle on the achievement, the little sailor had coldly replied that he was only carrying out his duty and earning his pay. And he had further mentioned that it was lucky for Commandant Balliot that he was a common, low-down Britisher, and not a fancy Belgian, or he would have thought of his own skin first, and steamed on comfortably down river and just contented himself with making a report. The white engineer of the launch—a drunken Scot—had, it seemed, been killed in the sortie, which, of course, was regretable; but Balliot (who disliked the Scot personally) had omitted to make the proper condolences; and it was at this that Kettle had taken umbrage and turned the nasty edge of his tongue outward.

"Now," said Captain Kettle, "enough time's been wasted. We will start business at once, please. That boiler's got to be mended, first."

"But," said Balliot, "it's under fire all the time."

"I can see that for myself," said the little sailor, "without being reminded by a subordinate who wasn't asked to speak. We take things as we find them, and so it's got to be mended under fire. Moreover, as the chief engineer of this vessel was killed ashore, and the second engineer was shot overboard, there's others that will have to take rating as engine-room officers. Commandant Balliot, have you any mechanics amongst your lot?"

"I have one man who acted as armorer-sergeant. He is very inefficient."

"He must do his best. Can you handle a drill or a monkey wrench, yourself?"

"No."

"Then I shall find you a laborer's job. Doc, are you handy with tools?"

"Only with those of my own trade," said Clay. "I'm pretty inefficient all round," he added, with a shrug, "or else I shouldn't be here."

"Very well," said Kettle, "then I'll rate myself chief engineer." He got up, and walked round to where the black second engineer, the last man shot, still nuzzled the boiler plates exactly in the same position where he had first fallen. He lifted one of the man's arms, and let it go. It jerked back again like a spring.

"Well, Daddy," he said, "you didn't take long to get stiff. They shot you nice and clean, anyway. I guess we'll let the river and the crocodiles bury you." With a sharp heave, he jerked the rigid body on to the rail, and even for the short second it poised there the poor dead clay managed to stop another of those bullets which flew up in such deadly silence from that distant sandbank.

"Good-by," said Kettle, as he toppled the corpse over, and it fell with a splash, stiff-limbed into the yellow water. He watched the body as it bobbed up again to the surface, and floated with the stream out into the silvery sunshine. "Good-by, cocky," said he. "You've been a good nigger, and, as you were shot doing your duty, they'll set you on at the place where you've gone to, one of the lightest jobs they've got suitable for a black pagan. That's a theological fact. You'll probable turn to and

stoke; I'll be sending you down presently another batch of heathen to shovel on the fire. I've got a biggish bill against those beggars on that sand-bank yonder for the mischief they've done."

But it was no place there to waste much time on sentiment. The woodwork of the shabby little steamer was riddled with splintered holes; the rusted iron plating was starred with gray lead-splashes; and every minute more bullets ploughed furrows in the yellow waters of the river, or whisped through the air overhead, or hit the vessel herself with peremptory knocks. It is all very well to affect a contempt for a straggling ill-aimed fire such as this; but, given a long enough exposure to it, one is bound to be hit; and so, if the work was to be attempted, the quicker it was set about the more chance there was of getting it finished.

They use wood fuel on these small, ungainly steamers which do their business up in the savage heart of Africa on the waters of the Haut Congo, and because every man with a gun for many reasons feels himself to be an enemy of the Free State, the steamers carry their firing logs stacked in ramparts round their boilers and other vital parts. But wood, as compared with coal, is bulky stuff to carry, and as the stowage capacity of these stern-wheelers is small, they have to make frequent calls to rebunker.

Indeed, it was for this purpose that Kettle had originally put in at the village where Commandant Balliot had his headquarters; and, as other events happened there which he had not calculated upon, he had steamed out into the broad river again without a chance of taking any logs on board, and, in fact, with his stock of fuel down very near to the vanishing-point.

On this account, therefore, after the fatal shot into the boiler, and the subsequent disablement and drifting on to the sandbank, all repairing work had to be done under full exposure to the fire of the mutineers. The Central African negro is a fairly stolid person, and as the sight of a little slaughter does not in the least upset his nerves, he can stand bullet hail for a good long time without emotion, especially if there is no noise and bustle attached to it. But once let a scare get rubbed home into his stupid brain, and let him get started off on the run, and he is an awkward person to stop.

But Kettle did not start to hustle his black laborers back to work at once. He knew that there would be heavy mortality amongst them once they were exposed to fire, and he wanted to lose as few of them as possible. He had got use for them afterward. So for long enough he worked alone, and the bullets spattered around him gayly. He hammered out a lead templet to cover the wound in the boiler, which, of course, as bad luck would have it, was situated at a place where three plates met; and then whilst Balliot's armorer with fire and hammer beat out a plate of iron the exact counterpart of this, he rigged a ratchet drill and bored holes through the boiler's skin to carry the necessary bolts.

Clay volunteered assistance once, but as he was told he would be asked for help when it was needed, he squatted down under the sheltered side of the boiler again, and smoked, and played more music-hall ditties on the banjo. Commandant Balliot held to a sullen silence. He was growing to have a poisonous hatred for this contemptuous little Englishman who by sheer superiority had made

him give up his treasured dictatorship, and he formed schemes for the Englishman's discomfiture in the near future.

But for the present he hoped very much that the man would not be killed; he recognized, with fresh spasms of anger every time he thought about it, that without Captain Kettle there would be no future—at any rate on this earth—for any of them.

And meanwhile Captain Owen Kettle, stripped to shoes and trousers, sweated over his work in the baking heat. Twice had a bullet grazed him, once on the neck, and once on the round of a shoulder, and red stains grew over the white satin of his skin. The work was strange to him certainly, but he set about it with more than an amateur's skill. All sailors have been handy with their fingers from time immemorial, but the modern steamer-sailor, during his apprenticeship as mate, has to turn his hand to a vast variety of trades. He is painter, carpenter, stevedore, crew-driver, all in one day; and on the next he is doctor, navigator, clerk, tailor, and engineer. And especially he is engineer. He must be able to drive winch, windlass, or crane, like an artist; he must have a good aptitude for using hand tools; and if he can work machine tools also, it is so much the better for him.

Yes, Captain Kettle put the patch on that boiler like a workman. He fitted his bolts, and made his joints; then luted the manhole and bolted that back in place; and then stepped down while a couple of negroes sluiced him with water from gourds, and rubbed him clean and dry with handfuls of wild cotton waste. So far, although the incessant hail of bullets had pitted the boiler's skin in a hundred places, no second shot had found a

spot sufficiently soft to make a puncture. The range of the bombardment was long, perhaps, and though a bullet at seven hundred yards may, with convenience, kill a man, it will not pierce seven-eighths boiler plate. And so, theoretically, the boiler was safe for the time being.

But practically it was otherwise. The boiler was by no means new. It was corroded with years, and incapacity, and neglect, as is the custom with all parts of boats and machinery on the Haut Congo. But it had been brought up to that waterway by carriers at vast expense from Matadi, the highest steamer port on the Lower Congo, probably costing three months and a dozen lives in transit, so that it was debited in the books of the Free State as being worth its weight in silver, and destined to be used on without replacement till it saw fit to burst.

So Kettle knew that in places it would be not much thicker than stout brown paper, and was quite aware that if any of the pattering bullets investigated one of these patches, he would have to do his work over again. He had a strong—and, I think, natural—disinclination for this. He had come through terrific risks during the last four hours, and could not expect to do so a second time with equal immunity; his two wounds smarted; and (although it sounds ludicrous that such a thing should have weight) the dirt inseparable from such employment jarred against his neat and cleanly habits, and filled him with unutterable disgust.

The moment, he conceived, was one for hurry. He told off four of the negroes as trimmers and stokers, and set Commandant Balliot over them to see that they pressed on with their work; he sent

Clay with a huge gang of helpers overboard on the lee side to risk the crocodiles, and dig away the sand; and he himself, with a dozen paddlers, got into the dug-out canoe, which was his only boat, and set to carrying out a kedge and line astern. All of these occupations took time, and when at last steam had mounted to a working pressure in the battered gauge, and they got on board again, two of his canoe-men had been shot, and one of Clay's party had been dragged away into deep water by a prowling crocodile.

As no one else was competent, Kettle himself took charge of the engines, and roared his commands with one hand on the throttle, and the other on the reversing gear; Clay, for the moment, was quartermaster, and stood to the wheel on the upper deck; and Balliot, under the tuition of curses and revilings, drove the winch, which heaved and slacked on the line made fast to the kedge.

The little steamer rolled and squeaked and coughed, and the paddle-wheel at her stern kicked up a compost of sand and mud and yellow water that almost choked them with its crushed marigold scent. The helm swung over alternately from hard-a-starboard to hard-a-port; the stern-wheel ground savagely into the sand, first one way and then the other; and the gutter, which she had delved for herself in the bank, grew gradually wider and more deep. Then slowly she began to make real progress astern.

"Now, heave on that kedge," Kettle yelled, and the winch bucked and clattered under a greater head of steam, and the warp sung to the strain; and presently the little vessel slid off the bank, picked up her anchor, and was free to go where she pleased.

"Hurrah," cried Balliot, "we are saved. You are a brave man, Captain."

"I didn't ask you to speak," retorted Kettle. "We aren't out of the wood by a long chalk yet."

"But we are out of their fire now. We shall be disturbed no further."

"No, my lad, but we've got a precious heap of disturbing to do on our own account before we've squared up for this tea party. I'm going to drop down stream to somewhere quiet where we can fill up with wood, and then I'm coming back again to give your late Tommies bad fits."

"But I don't authorize this. I didn't foresee——"

"Very likely not. But a fat lot I care for that. Fact remains that I'm skipper here, and I'm going to do as I think best. I've got it in mind that my two engineers and a lot of good niggers have been shot by those disgusting savages over yonder, and I don't permit that sort of thing without making somebody pay a pretty steep bill for the amusement. So I'm going down stream to wood up, and then we'll come back and make them pay for the tea party."

"You are exceeding your powers. I warn you."

"If any of my inferiors on board ship don't keep their heads shut when they aren't spoken to," said Kettle unpleasantly, "I always disarrange their front teeth. If I have any more palaver from you, you'll get to know what it feels like." He shouted up the companion way—"On top there, quartermaster?"

"Hullo?" said Clay.

"Keep her down river to M'barri-m'barri. That's a twelve-mile run from here. There are two big cot-

ton woods in a line which will bring you to the landing. You know the channel?"

"I ought to. I've been up and down it times enough. But I guess I don't—at least, not now."

"Fuddled again, are you? Then I'll con you from here. You see three trees growing on that island bang ahead? Keep her on those." He turned to a couple of stalwart niggers at his side—"Say, you boys, you lib for top, one-time. You take dem Doctor's gin-bottle, and you throw him overboard, one-time. If dem Doctor he make palaver, you throw him overboard too. Away with you now. By James! we got to get discipline in this ship somehow, and I'm a man that can teach it. Here, you black swine at that furnace, go slow with those logs, or we won't be able to steam her half-way."

He bustled about the little vessel, turning every soul on board to some employment or other; and those of the newcomers who did not know his wishes, and were not quick enough for his taste, received instruction in a manner which is understood by men all the world over, be their skins black, or white, or yellow.

The process might not be very pleasant for those who came in contact with it, but it was very effective for the purpose aimed at. In sea parlance Kettle had to "break up" some half-dozen of them before all hands acquiesced to his dictatorship; but they were quick to see there was a Man over them this time, and involuntarily they admired his virility even while they rubbed ruefully at their bumps; and during the times of stress that came afterward, none of these Africans were so smart to obey as those on whom their taskmaster's hand had originally come heaviest.

The period of instruction was short. It began when the little stern-wheeler slipped off the bank and got under weigh. It was completed satisfactorily during the twelve miles run down the river. The boat was steered into M'barri-m'barri creek, made hastily fast to trees on the bank, and exuded her people in an armed rush. They had possession of the place almost before the villagers knew of their arrival, and proceeded to the object of their call. There was no especial show of violence.

The women and the children were imprisoned in the huts; the men were given axes, and sent off into the forest to cut and gather fuel; and, meanwhile, the landing party set themselves to eat what they fancied, and to carry off any store of ivory and rubber that they might chance upon. There was nothing remarkable in the manœuvre. It is the authorized course of proceedings when a Free State launch goes into the bank for wood and supplies.

The villagers brought down the logs smartly enough, and waxed quite friendly on finding that none of the hostage women and children had been killed or maltreated during their absence. They duly gave up the German axes which had been loaned to them, and carried the wood aboard. Kettle arranged its disposition. He had solid defences built up all round the vulnerable boiler and engines. He had a stout breastwork built all round inside the rail of the lower deck, quite stout enough to absorb a bullet even if fired at point-blank range. And he had another breastwork built on the third deck, above the cabins, so that he turned the flimsy little steamer into a very staunch, if somewhat ungainly, floating fort.

He got on board the rubber and ivory he had

collected, and had it struck down below—the dividends of the State have to be remembered first, even at moments of trouble like these—and then he gave orders, and the vessel set off again up stream. On the lower deck he stayed himself during the journey back, and gave instructions to Commander Balliot in the art of engine-driving.

Balliot was sullen at first, and showed little inclination to acquire so warm and grimy a craft, and fenced himself behind his dignity. But Kettle put forth his persuasive powers; he did not hit the man, he merely talked; and under the merciless lash of that vinegary little tongue, Balliot repented him of his stubbornness, and set himself to acquire the elementary knack of engine nursing and feeding and driving.

"And now," said Kettle, cheerfully, when the pupil had mastered the vague outlines of his business, "you see what can be done by kindness. I haven't hit you once, and you know enough already not to blow her up if only you're careful. Don't you even sham stupid again; and, see here, don't you grit your teeth at me when you think I'm not looking, or I'll beat you into butcher's meat when I've hammered these rebels, and have a bit of spare time. You want to learn a lot of manners yet, Mr. Commandant Balliot, and where I come from we teach these to foreigners free of charge. Just you remember that I'm your better, my man, and give me proper respect, or I'll lead you a life a nigger's yellow dog wouldn't fancy."

Now the revolted troops, when they saw the launch wriggle off the bank where she was stuck, and steam away down stream, were filled with exasperation, because they had confidently antici-

pated making a barbecue out of Commandant Balliot in return for many cruelties received, and doing the same by any other Europeans whom they might catch on the steamer, because, being white, they would be presumably relatives of Balliot. It never occurred to their simple minds that the launch would return, much less that she would offer them battle; so when indeed she did appear again, they were in the midst of a big consultation about their future movements.

However, the African who owns a gun, be he revolted soldier or mere peaceful farmer, never lets that weapon go far away from his hand, for fear that his neighbor should send him away into the land of shadows in order to possess it. And so a fusillade was soon commenced. But the launch, armed with her fine rampart of logs, bore it unflinchingly, and steamed up within a hundred yards of the thick of them, and just held there in her place, with her wheel gently flapping against the stream, and opened a vicious fire from fifty muzzles.

Of modern rifles Kettle had only twenty on board, but he had an abundance of those beautiful instruments known as "trade guns," and at shot-range a man can be killed just as definitely by a dose of pot-leg out of a gas-pipe barrel as he can by a dum-dum bullet sent through scientific rifling. Indeed, for close-quarter fighting pot-leg is far more comprehensive, and far less likely to miss than the lonely modern bullet. Moroever, his crew had quite as much dread for him as they had for the enemy, and as a consequence they fought with a briskness which made even their grim little chief approve.

The crowd of mutineers did not, however, offer

themselves to be browned like a pack of helpless sheep for long. They were Africans who had been born in an atmosphere of scuffle and skirmish, and death had no especial terrors for them. Moreover, they had learnt certain elements of the modern art of war from white officers; and now, in the moment of trial, their dull brains worked, and the crafty knowledge came back to them. They were a thousand strong; they had friends all round—cannibal friends—who would come to help in the fight and share in the loot; and, moreover, they had canoes. Other well-manned canoes also were fast coming to their help down stream.

In the canoes then they put off, and Kettle smiled grimly as he saw the move. He had thought of this before, but it was greater luck than he had dared hope for. But now the enemy had given himself over into his hand. The one strong position of the stern-wheel launch was her forward part. The Congo is full of snags and floating logs which cannot always be avoided, and so all steamers are strengthened to stand contact with them; and he could give them the stem now without risk to himself.

He pretended flight when the canoes first came out, standing across toward the further bank of the river, which was some dozen miles away. The rebels fell into the lure, and paddled frantically after him. Canoe after canoe put out, as fast as they could be manned. The white men on the steamer were running away; they were frightened; there was spoil and revenge to be got for the taking. And from unseen villages on the islands and on the bank other canoes shot out to get their share.

In the mean while Kettle consolidated his defences.

Frantically he worked, and like Trojans Clay and the negroes labored under him. All that drunken doctor's limp *laissez faire* was gone now. The blood of some fighting ancestor had warmed up inside him. He might be physically weak and unhandy, but the lust of battle filled him up like new drink, and he forgot his disgraceful past, and lived only for the thrill of the present moment.

The log barricades had to be lashed and strutted so that no collision could unship them, and all hands sweated and strained in that tropical heat, till the job could not be bettered. And at the after part of the lower deck, Commandant Balliot, driven on also by the strong-willed man whom nobody on board could resist, tended the engines with all his brain and nerve, and did his best to make the fighting machine perfect.

"Now," said Kettle at last, "as we have got those fool Tommies nicely tailed out about the river, we'll quit this running-away game, and get to business. Mr. Chief Engineer, open that throttle all it'll go, and let her rip, and mind you're standing by for my next order. Doc, you keep your musketry class well in hand. Don't waste shots. But when you see me going to run down a canoe, stand by to give them eternal ginger when they're ten yards from the stern. I'll whistle when you're to fire."

Captain Kettle went on to the upper deck and took over the wheel, and screwed it over hard-a-port. The little top-heavy steamer swung round in a quick circle, lurching over dangerously to the outside edge. She ran for half a mile up stream, and then turned again and came back at the top of her gait. She was aiming at one particular canoe, which for a while came on pluckily enough to meet her.

But African nerve has its limits, and the sight of this strange uncouth steamer, which followed so unflinchingly their every movement, was too much for the sweating paddlers. They turned their ponderous dug-out's head, and tried to escape.

Kettle watched them like a cat. He had the whistle string in his teeth, so as to leave him both hands free for the steering wheel, and when the moment came he threw back his head, and drew the string. The scream of the steam whistle was swamped instantly in the roar of a blasting volley. Not many of the shots hit—for the African is not a marksman—but the right effect was gained. The blacks in the canoe ducked and flinched; they were for the moment quite demoralized; and before they could man their paddles again, the stern-wheeler's stem had crushed into their vessel, had cut a great gash from one side, had rolled it over, and then mounted the wreck, and drove down stream across the top of it.

A few more angry shots snapped out at the black bodies swimming in the yellow water. "Hold up, there," Kettle ordered, "and let them swim if they can, and chance the crocodiles. They've got their gruel. Load up now, and get ready for the next."

He turned the launch again, and stood across the stream down the strung-out line of canoes, occasionally making feints at them, but ramming no more for the present. They all fired at him as he passed them; indeed, a wild, scattered fire was general from all the fleet; but his log armor protected him from this, and he steamed grimly on, without returning a shot.

At the furthermost end of the line he turned sharply again, and ran down the last canoe, just as he

had run down the other; and then he deliberately started to drive the whole fleet together into one solid flock. He had the speed of them, and with rifle fire they could not damage him, but for all that it was not easy work. They expected the worst, and made desperate efforts to scatter and escape; finally, he drove them altogether in one hopeless huddle—cowed, scared, and tired out; and then he brought the stern-wheeler to a sudden stop just above them, and made Clay shout out terms in the native tongue.

They were to throw all their weapons overboard into the river. They did it without question.

They were to throw their paddles overboard. They did that also.

They were to tie all their canoes together into one big raft. They obeyed him there, too, with frenzied quickness.

He took the raft in tow and steamed off down river to the headquarters Free State post of the Upper River. He was feeling almost complacent at the time. He had shown Commandant Balliot what he was pleased to term a quick way with rebels.

But Commandant Balliot, whose life had been saved, and army disarmed and brought back from rebellion in spite of himself, was not the man to let any vague feeling of gratitude overweigh his own deep sense of injury. He was incompetent, and he knew it, but Kettle had been tactless enough to tell him so; and, moreover, Kettle had thrown out the national gibe about Waterloo, which no Belgian can ever forgive. Commandant Balliot gritted his teeth, and rubbed at his scrubby beard, and melodramatically vowed revenge.

He said nothing about it then; he even sat at

meat with the two Englishmen, and shared the ship duties with them without so much as a murmur. He could not but notice, too, that Kettle said nothing more now about being supreme chief, and had, in fact, tacitly dropped back to his old position as skipper of the launch. But Balliot brooded over the injuries he had received at the hands of this truculent little sailor, and they grew none the smaller from being held in memory.

Kettle's own method of reporting his doings, too, was not calculated to endear him to the authorities. He steamed down to headquarters at Leopoldville, went ashore, and swung into the Commandant's house with easy contempt and assurance. He gave an arid account of the launch's voyage up the great river to the centre of Africa and back, and then in ten words described Balliot's disaster, his rescue, and its cost. "And so," he wound up, "as the contract was outside Mr. Balliot's size, I took it in my own hands and carried it through. I've brought back your blooming army down here. It's quite tame now."

The Commandant at Leopoldville nodded stiffly, and said he would confer with Captain Kettle's senior officer, Commandant Balliot, after which Kettle would probably hear something further.

"All right," said the little man. "I should tell you, too, that Mr. Balliot's not without his uses. With a bit of teaching I got him to handle my engines quite decent for an amateur." He turned to go, but stopped again in the glare of the doorway. "Oh, there's one other thing. I want to recommend to you Doctor Clay. He's a good man, Clay. He stood by me well in the trouble we had, after he got roused up. I'd like to recommend him for promotion."

"I will see if Commandant Balliot—as senior officer—adds his recommendation to yours," said the other drily. "Good-morning to you for the present."

Captain Kettle went down to the beach, and stepped along the gangway on to the stern-wheel launch. The working negroes on the lower deck stopped their chatter for the moment as he passed, and looked up at him with a queer mixture of awe and admiration. From above came the tinkle of a banjo and the roar of an English song. The doctor was free, and was amusing himself according to his fashion.

Kettle got his accordion and went up on the hurricane deck and joined him, and till near on sundown the pair of them sat there giving forth music alternately. There was a fine contrast between them. The disreputable doctor deliberately forgot everything of the past, and lived only for the reckless present; the shipmaster had got his wife and children always filling half his memory, and was in a constant agony lest he should fail to properly provide for them. And as a consequence Clay's music was always of the lighter sort, and was often more than impolite; while Kettle's was, for the most part, devotional, and all of it sober, staid, and thoughtful. They were a strong contrast, these two, but they pulled together with one another wonderfully. Kettle used sometimes to wonder why it was, and came to the conclusion that it was the tie of music which did it. But Clay never worried about the matter at all. He was not the man to fill his head with useless problems.

But on this afternoon their concert was cut short before its finish. Commandant Balliot came back to the launch with satisfaction on his streaming face, and two armed black soldiers plodding at his heels.

"Well," said Kettle, "have they made you a colonel yet, or are they only going to give you the Congo medal?"

"You sacred pig," said Balliot, "you talked to M. le Commandant here of rebels. What are you but a rebel? I have told him all, and he has sent me to arrest you."

"Good old Waterloo," said Kettle cheerfully. "I bet you lied, and because you are both Belgians, I suppose he believed you."

The fat man gritted his teeth. "You talked of having a short way with rebels yourself. You will find that we have a short way here, too. You are under arrest."

"So you've said."

Balliot said a couple of words in the native to one of his followers, and the man produced a pair of rusty handcuffs and held them out alluringly.

Kettle's pale cheeks flushed darkly. "No," he said, "by James! No, that's not the way for a thing like you to set about it." He jumped to his feet, and thrust his savage little face close to the black soldier's eyes. "Give me dem handcuffs." The man surrendered them limply, and Kettle flung them overboard. Balliot was trying to get a revolver from the leather holster at his waist, but Kettle, who had his weapon in a hip pocket, was ready first, and covered him.

"Throw up your hands!"

Commandant Balliot did so. He knew enough about Captain Kettle to understand that he meant business.

"Tell your soldiers to drop their guns, or I'll spread their brains on the deck."

Balliot obeyed that order also.

"Now, Doc," said Kettle in a different tone, "pack your traps and go ashore."

"What for?" asked Clay.

"Because I'm going to take this steamer for a cruise up river. I don't mind getting the sack; I'd reckoned on that. But, by James! I'm not going to be arrested by these Belgian brutes, and that's final."

"Well, I suppose they would string you up, or shoot you, to soothe their precious dignity, from what His Whiskers here says."

"They're not going to get the chance," snapped Kettle. "Handcuffs, by James! Here, clear out, Doc, and let me get the ship under way."

"No," said Clay. "I fancy I've had about enough of the Congo Free State service, too. I'll come, too."

"Don't be an idiot."

Dr. Clay gave a whimsical laugh. "Have I ever been anything else all my life?"—He went across and took the revolver out of Balliot's holster—"Now, there, I've burnt my boats. I've disarmed His Whiskers here, and defied authority, and that gives them a *casus belli* against me. You'll have to take me along now out of sheer pity."

"Very well," said Kettle; "help me to shove the three of them into one of the empty rooms below, and then mount guard on them to see they don't make a row. We mustn't have them giving the alarm of this new game till we've got a start on us. You're a good soul, Doc. I'll never forget this of you."

And so Captain Owen Kettle finally severed his connection with the Congo Free State service, and set off at once again as his own master. He had no trouble with the black crew of the launch. The

men half adored, half dreaded him; and, anyway, were prepared to take his orders before any others. They got the little vessel under weigh again, and just before the gang-plank was pulled in, Commandant Balliot and his disarmed escort were driven on to the beach.

The Belgian was half wild with mortification and anger. "You have won now," he screamed. "But you will be fetched back, and I myself will see that you are disgracefully hanged."

"If you come after me and worry me," said Kettle, coolly, "I'll give you my men to chop. Just you remember that, Mr. Waterloo. I think you know already that I am a fellow that never lies."

CHAPTER IV

THE NEW REPUBLIC

The fighting ended, and promptly both the invaders and the invaded settled down to the new course of things without further exultation or regret. An hour after it had happened, the capture of the village was already regarded as ancient history, and the two white men had got a long way on in their discussion on its ultimate fate.

"No," Captain Kettle was saying, "no being king for me, Doctor, thank you. I've been offered a king's ticket once, and that sickened me of the job for good and always. The world's evidently been going on too long to start a new kingdom nowadays, and I'm too much of a conservative to try and break the rule. No, a republic's the thing, and, as you say, I'm the stronger man of the two of us. Doc, you may sign me on as President."

Dr. Clay turned away his face, and relieved his feelings with a grin. But he very carefully concealed his merriment. He liked Kettle, liked him vastly; but at the same time he was more than a little scared of him, and he had a very accurate notion that the man who failed to take him seriously about this new scheme, would come in contact with trouble. The scheme was a big one; it purposed setting up a new state in the heart of the État du Congo, on territory filched from that power; but the little sailor was in deadly earnest over the project, and

already he had met with extraordinary luck in the initial stages. Central Africa is a country where determined *coups de main* can sometimes yield surprising results.

The recent history of these two vagabond white men cannot be given in this place with any web of detail. They had gone through their apprenticeship amongst these African inlands as officers of the Congo Free State; they had been divorced from that service with something of suddenness; and a purist might have held that the severance of their ties was complicated with something very near akin to piracy. I know that they had been abominably oppressed; I know that Kettle chose running away with his steamer to the alternative of handcuffs and disgrace, and a possible hanging to follow; but there was no getting over the fact that the stern-wheeler was Free State property, and that these two had alienated it to their own uses.

The black crew of the launch and the black soldiers on board, some seventy head all told, they had little trouble in dragooning into obedience. The Central African native never troubles himself much about niceties of loyalty, and as the sway of the Congo Free State (or "Buli Matdi," as it is named by the woolly aboriginal), had been brutally tyrannous, the change of allegiance had worried them little. Besides, they had been in contact with Captain Kettle before, and knew him to be that admirable thing, a Man, and worthy of being served; while Clay, whom they also knew, amused them with his banjo, and held powerful *ju-ju* in the shape of drugs; and so they went blithely enough where they were led or driven, and described themselves as soldiers or slaves, whichever word happened to

come handiest. The African of the interior never worries his head about the terms of his service. So long as he has plenty of food, and a master to do all the thinking for him, he is quite content to work, or steal, or fight, or be killed, as that master sees fit to direct.

The progress of the little stern-wheel steamer on her return journey up the Haut Congo might also give rise to misapprehension here at home, if it were described exactly as it happened. There are no ship's chandlers in Central Africa, and it is the custom there, when you lack stores, to go to a village on the bank and requisition anything that is available. The Arab slave-traders who once held the country did this; the prehistoric people before them founded the custom; and the Free State authorities, their lineal descendants, have not seen fit to change the policy. At least, they may have done so in theory at Brussels, but out there, in practice, they have left this matter *in statu quo*.

There is a massive conservatism about the heart of Africa with which it is dangerous to tamper. If you rob a man in that region, he merely respects your superior power. If you offer him payments, he promptly suspects you of weakness, and sets his clumsy mind at work to find the method by which you may be robbed of whatever you have not voluntarily surrendered.

"Of course," said Kettle, taking up the thread of his tale again, "it's understood that we run this country for our own advantage first."

"What other object should white men have up-country in Africa?" said Clay. "We don't come here merely for our health."

"But I've got a great notion of treating the

people well besides. When we have made a sufficient pile—and, mark you, it must be all in ivory, as there's nothing else of value that can be easy enough handled—we shall clear out for the Coast, one-time. And then we must realize on the ivory, and then we can go home and live as Christians again." He stared through the doorway of the hut at the aching sunshine beyond. "Oh, Lord! Think of it, Doc—Home! England! Decent clothes! Regular attendance in chapel on Sundays, and your soul well cared for and put into safe going order again!"

"Oh, my soul doesn't bother me. But England! that's fine to think about, old man, isn't it? England!" he repeated dreamily. "Yes, I suppose I should have to change my name if I did go back. I don't know, though. It'd have blown over by now, perhaps; things do blow over, and if I went to a new part of the country I expect I could still stick to the old name, and not be known from Adam. Yes, things do blow over with time, and if you don't make too much stir when you go back. I should have to keep pretty quiet; but I bet I'd have a good time for all that. Fancy the luxury of having good Glenlivet in a cask again, with a tap half-way up, after the beastly stuff one got on the coast, or, worse still, what one gets up here—and that's no whiskey at all!"

"Well, you needn't worry about choosing your home drinks just now," said Kettle. "'Palaver no set' here by a very long chalk yet, and till it is you'll have to go sober, my lad, and keep a very clear head."

Clay came to earth again. "Sorry, Skipper," he said, "but you set me off. 'Tisn't often I look across at either to-morrow or yesterday. As you

say, it's a very dry shop this, and so the sooner we get what we want and quit, the sooner we shall hit on a good time again. And the sooner we clear out, too, the less chance we have of those beastly Belgians coming in here to meddle. You know we've had luck so far, and they haven't interfered with us. But we can't expect that for always. The Congo Free State's a trading corporation, with dividends to make for the firm of Leopold and Co., in Brussels, and they don't like trade rivals. What stealing can be done in the country, they prefer to do themselves."

"When the time comes," said the little sailor grimly, "we shall be ready for them, and if they interfere with me, I shall make the Congo Free State people sit up. But in the mean while they are not here, and I don't see that they need be expected. They can trace us up the Congo from Leopoldville, if you like, by the villages we stopped at—one, we'll say, every two hundred miles—but then we find this new river, and where are we? The river's not charted; it's not known to any of the Free State people, or I, being in their steamboat service, would have been told of it; and the entrance is so well masked at its Congo end by islands, that no one would guess it was there. The Congo's twenty miles wide where our river comes in, and very shallow, and the steamer-channel's right at the further bank. If they'd another Englishman in their service up here, I'd not say; but don't you tell me that the half-baked Dutchmen and Dagos who skipper their launches would risk hunting out a new channel, and blunder on it that way."

"No," said Clay, "I'm with you there. But word travels amongst the natives. You can't get over that."

"That's where the risk comes in. But I've done my best to make it travel slow. I've got hold of that beast of a witch-doctor, who deserves hanging anyway for all the poor wretches he's killed, and I've told him that as soon as word slips out down-river of our being here, he'll get shot, one-time. He's a man of influence, that witch-doctor, and I shouldn't wonder but what he makes the natives keep their heads shut for quite a long time."

"It may be professional prejudice, but I rather hope that local practitioner gets his gruel somehow before we clear out." Clay shivered. "He's a cruel devil. Remember the remains of those two poor sacrificed wretches we found when we got here?"

Kettle shrugged his shoulders. "I know. But what could one do? Niggers always are like that when they're left to play about alone—as these here have been, I suppose, since Creation Day. We couldn't pin the sacrifices on to the witch-doctor, or else, of course, we'd have strung him up. We could only just give him an order for these customs to stop one-time, and stand by to see it carried out. But we start the thing from now, on fresh, sensible lines. We're going to have no foolery about the nigger being as good as a white man. He isn't, and no man that ever saw him where he grows ever thought so."

"Speaking scientifically," said Clay, "it has always struck me that a nigger is an animal placed by the scheme of creation somewhere between a monkey and a white man. You might bracket him, say, with a Portugee."

"About that," said Kettle; "and if you treat him as more, you make him into a bad failure, whereas if he's left alone, he's a bit nasty and cruel. Now I

think, Doc, there's a middle course, and that's what I'm going to try here whilst we're making our pile. We've grabbed four tidy villages already, and that makes a good beginning for this new republic; and when we've got things organized a bit more, and have a trifle of time, we can grab some others. And, by James! Doc, there's a name for you—the New Republic!"

"I seem to think it's been used in a book somewhere."

"The New Republic!" Kettle repeated relishingly. "It goes well. It's certain to have been used before, but it's good enough to be used again. Some day, perhaps, it'll have railways, and public-houses, and a postal service, and some day it may even issue stamps of its own."

"With your mug in the middle!"

Captain Kettle reddened. "I don't see why not," he said stiffly. "I started the show, and by James! whilst I'm running it, the New Republic's got to hum; and when I'm gone, I shall be remembered as some one out of the common. I'm a man, Doctor Clay, that's got a high sense of duty. I should think it wrong to stay here sweating ivory out of these people, if I didn't put something into them in return."

"Well, you do seem to have got a hold over them, and that's a fact, and I guess you will be able to make them——" he broke off, and burst into a cackle of laughter. "Oh, my Christian aunt, look there!"

A mob of natives were reverently approaching the hut, two of them carrying skinny chickens. The witch-doctor led the advance. Kettle guessed what was intended, and got up from his seat to interfere.

"Oh, look here, Skipper," Clay pleaded, "don't

spoil the show. Let's do the traveller for once, and observe the 'interesting native customs.' You needn't be afraid; they're going to sacrifice the bigger hen to you, right enough."

Captain Kettle allowed himself to be persuaded, and sat back again. The mob of negroes came up to the doorway of the hut, and the witch-doctor, with many prostrations to the little sailor, made a long speech. Then the larger of the two fowls entered into the ceremony, and was slain with a sword, and the witch-doctor, squatting on the ground, read the omens.

Kettle accepted the homage with glum silence, evidently restraining himself, but when Clay's turn came, and the smaller and scraggier of the chickens yielded up life in his honor, he hitched up his feet, and squatted cross-legged on the chair, and held up his hand palm outward, after the manner of some grotesque Chinese idol. A sense of the absurd was one of the many things which had hampered this disreputable doctor all through his unlucky career.

The negroes, however, took it all in good part, and in time they departed, well satisfied. But Kettle wore a gloomy face.

"Funny, wasn't it?" said Clay.

"I call it beastly," Kettle snapped. "This sort of thing's got to stop. I'm not going to have my new Republic dirtied by shows like that."

"Well," said Clay flippantly, "if you will set up as a little tin god on wheels, you must expect them to say their prayers to you."

"I didn't do anything of the kind. I merely stepped in and conquered them."

"Put it as you please, old man. But there's no

getting over it that that's what they take you for."

"Then, by James! it comes to this: they shall be taught the real thing!"

"What, you'll import a missionary?"

"I shall wade in and teach them myself."

"Phew!" whistled Clay. "If you're going to start the New Jerusalem game on the top of the New Republic, I should say you'll have your hands full."

"Probably," said Kettle grimly; "but I am equal to that."

"And you'll not have much time left to see after ivory palaver."

"I shall go on collecting the ivory just the same. I shall combine business with duty. And"—here he flushed somewhat—"I'm going to take the bits of souls these niggers have got, and turn them into the straight path."

Clay rubbed his bald head. "If you're set on it," said he, "you'll do it; I quite agree with you there. But I should have thought you'd seen enough of the nigger to know what a disastrous animal he is after some of these missionaries have handled him."

"Yes," said Kettle; "but those were the wrong sort of missionary—wrong sort of man to begin with; wrong sort of religion also."

And then, to Dr. Clay's amazement, his companion broke out into a violent exposition of his own particular belief. It was the first time he had ever heard Kettle open his lips on the subject of religion, and the man's vehemence almost scared him. Throughout the time they had been acquainted, he had taken him to be like all other lay white men on the Congo, quite careless on the subject, and an

abhorrer of missions and all their output; and, lo! here was an enthusiast, with a violent creed of his very own, and with ranting thunders to heave at all who differed from him by so much as a hairs-breadth. Here was a devotee who suddenly, across a great ocean of absence, remembered the small chapel in South Shields, where during shore days he worshipped beside his wife and children. Here was a prophet, jerked by circumstances into being, trumpeting the tenets of an obscure sect with something very near to inspiration.

He preached and preached on till the tropical day burned itself out, and the velvety night came down, and with it the mists from the river. The negroes of the village, with their heads wrapped up to keep off the ghosts, shivered as they listened to "dem small whiteman make ju-ju" across the clearing. Clay listened because he could not get away. He knew the man well, yes, intimately; he was constantly dealing him out unpalatable flippancies; but in this new, this exalted mood, he did not care to do less than give attention.

The man seemed to have changed; his eyes were bright and feverish; his face was drawn; his voice had lost its shipmaster's brusqueness, and had acquired the drone of the seaman's shore conventicle. There was no doubt about his earnestness; in Clay's mind, there was no doubt about the complications which would ensue from it.

When Dr. Clay lay down on his bed that night, his mind was big with foreboding. Ever since that entanglement with the woman occurred, which ruined forever his chance of practicing in England, he had gone his way with a fine recklessness as to consequences. He had lived for the day, and the day

only; he had got to the lowest peg on the medical scale; and any change would be an improvement. He carried with him an incomplete case of instruments, a wire-strung banjo, and a fine taste in liquor and merriment as stock-in-trade, and if any of the many shapes which Death assumes in the Congo region came his way, why there he was ready to journey on.

But during these last weeks a chance had appeared of returning to England with a decent competency, and he jumped at it with an eagerness which only those who have at one time or other "gone under" themselves can appreciate. In effect he had entered into a partnership with Captain Owen Kettle over a filibustering expedition—although they gave the thing different names—and from the first their ivory raiding had been extraordinarily successful. If only they could collect on undisturbed for another six months at the same rate, and then get their spoils down to the coast and shipped, the pair of them stepped into a snug competence at once. But this latest vagary of his partner's seemed to promise disruption of the whole enterprise. He did not see how Kettle could possibly carry out this evangelizing scheme, on which he had so suddenly gone crazed, without quite neglecting his other commercial duties.

However, in the course of the next day or so, as he witnessed Captain Kettle's method of spreading his faith, Clay's forebodings began to pass away. There was nothing of the hypocrite about this preaching sailor; but, at the same time, there was nothing of the dreamer. He exhorted vast audiences daily to enter into the narrow path (as defined by the Tyneside chapel), but, at the same time, he

impressed on them that the privilege of treading this thorny way in no manner exempted them from the business of gathering ivory, by one means or another, for himself and partner.

Kettle had his own notions as to how this proselytizing should be carried on, and he set about it with a callous disregard for modern precedent. He expounded his creed—the creed of the obscure Tyneside chapel—partly in Coast-English, partly in the native, partly through the medium of an interpreter, and he commanded his audience to accept it, much as he would have ordered men under him to have carried out the business of shipboard. If any one had doubts, he explained further—once. But he did not allow too many doubts. One or two who inquired too much felt the weight of his hand, and forthwith the percentage of sceptics decreased marvellously.

Clay watched on, non-interferent, hugging himself with amusement, but not daring to let a trace of it be seen. "And I thought," he kept telling himself with fresh spasms of suppressed laughter, "that that man's sole ambition was to set up here as a sort of robber baron, and here he's wanting to be Mahomet as well. The crescent or the sword; Kettleism or kicks; it's a pity he hasn't got some sense of humor, because as it is I've got all the fun to myself. He'd eat me if I told him how it looked to an outsider."

Once, with the malicious hope of drawing him, he did venture to suggest that Kettle's method of manufacturing converts was somewhat sudden and arbitrary, and the little sailor took him seriously at once.

"Of course it is," said he. "And if you please,

why shouldn't it be? My intelligence is far superior to theirs at the lowest estimate; and therefore I must know what's best for them. I order them to become members of my chapel, and they do it."

"They do it like birds," Clay admitted. "You've got a fine grip over them."

"I think they respect me."

"Oh, they think you no end of a fine man. In fact they consider you, as I've said before, quite a little tin——"

"Now stop it, Doc. I know you're one of those fellows that don't mean half they say, but I won't have that thrown against me, even in jest."

"Well," said Clay, slily, "there's no getting over the fact that some person or persons unknown sacrificed a hen up against the door of this hut under cover of last night, and I guess they're not likely to waste the fowl on me."

"One can't cure them of their old ways all at once," said Kettle, with a frown.

"And some genius," Clay went on, "has carved a little wooden image in trousers and coat, nicely whitewashed, and stuck up on that old *ju-ju* tree down there by the swamp. I saw it when I was down there this morning. Of course, it mayn't be intended to be a likeness of you, skipper, but it's got a pith helmet on, which the up-country nigger doesn't generally add to portraits of himself; and moreover, it's wearing a neat torpedo beard on the end of its chin, delicately colored vermilion."

"Well?" said Kettle sourly.

"Oh, that had got a hen sacrificed in front of it, too, that's all. I recognize the bird; he was a game old

rooster that used to crow at me every time I passed him."

"Beastly pagans," Kettle growled. "There's no holding some of them yet. They suck up the glad tidings like mother's milk at first, and they're back at their old ways again before you've taught them the tune of a hymn. I just want to catch one or two of these backsliders. By James! I'll give them fits in a way they won't forget."

But if Captain Kettle was keen on the conversion of the heathen to the tenets of the Tyneside chapel, he was by no means forgetful of his commercial duties. He had always got Mrs. Kettle, the family, and the beauties of a home life in an agricultural district at the back of his mind, and to provide the funds necessary for a permanent enjoyment of all these items close at hand, he worked both Clay and himself remorselessly.

Ivory does not grow on hedgerows even in Africa, and the necessary store could by no means be picked up even in a day, or even in a matter of weeks. Ivory has been looked upon by the African savage, from time immemorial, not as an article of use, but as currency, and as such it is vaguely revered. He does not often of his own free will put it into circulation; in fact, his life may well pass without his once seeing it used as a purchasing medium; but custom sits strong on him, and he likes to have it by him. An African chief of any position always has his store of ivory, usually hidden, sometimes in the bush, sometimes buried—for choice, under the bed of a stream. It is foolish of him, this custom, because it is usually the one thing that attracts the white man to his neighborhood, and the white man's visits are frequently fraught with disaster;

but it is a custom, and therefore he sticks to it. He is not a highly reasoning animal, this Central African savage.

The African, moreover, is used to oppression—that is, he either oppresses or is oppressed—and he is dully callous to death. So the villages were not much surprised at Kettle's descents upon them, and usually surrendered to him passively on the mere prestige of his name. They were pleasantly disappointed that he omitted the usual massacre, and in gratitude were eager to accept what they were pleased to term his *ju-ju*, but which he described as the creed of the Tyneside chapel.

They reduced him to frenzy about every second day by surreptitiously sacrificing poultry in his honor; but he did not dare to make any very violent stand against this overstepping of the rubric, lest (as was hinted to him) they should misinterpret his motive, and substitute a plump nigger baby for the more harmless spring chicken. It is by no means easy to follow the workings of the black man's brain in these matters.

But all the time he went on gathering ivory—precious ivory, worth as much as a thousand pounds a ton if he could but get it home. Some of it had been buried for centuries, and was black-brown with age and the earth; some was new, and still bloody-ended and odorous; but he figured it all out into silk dresses for Mrs. Kettle, and other luxuries for those he loved, and gloated even over the little *escribellos* which lay about on the village refuse heaps as not being worthy to hide with the larger tusks.

And, between-whiles, he preached to the newly conquered, ordered them to adopt the faith of the

South Shields chapel, and finally sang them hymns, which he composed himself especially to suit their needs, to the tunes of "Hold the Fort," and "From Greenland's Icy Mountains," which he played very sweetly on the accordion. Captain Kettle might be very keen after business, but at the same time it could never be laid to his charge that he was ever forgetful of the duty he owed to the souls of these heathen who came under his masterful thumb.

Dr. Clay, however, watched all the proceedings now with a jubilant mind. As a political division, the much-talked-of New Republic might be said to lack cohesion, but as a conquered tract of country it was very pleasantly in awe of Captain Kettle. A very comfortable store of ivory was stored in the principal hut of each village they came to, which Clay, who commanded the rear guard, always took care to "put *ju-ju* on" after his senior officer at the head of the force had marched out of the village *en route* for the next, that being the most satisfactory fashion of warding off pilferers. And last but not least, they had agreed upon their route of exit to a sea-coast, and (in theory at any rate) considered it eminently practicable.

The Congo, of course, *via* Leopoldville, Matadi, and Banana was barred to them, on account of their trouble with the Free State authorities. Their original idea had been to cross the great continent eastward by way of the Great Lakes, and take shipping somewhere by Mozambique or Zanzibar. But the barbarous difficulties of that route daunted even Kettle, when they began to consider it in detail, and the advantages of the French Congo territory showed up brightly in comparison.

They still had the little stern-wheel steamer that was filched—I beg their pardon, captured from the Free State, and in her, with the loot on board, they must creep down the Congo again, almost to Stanley Pool, steaming by night only, hiding at the back of islands during the days, always avoiding observation. And then they must strike across country due west, till they made the head-waters of the Ogowe, and so down to the sea, fighting a way through whatever tribes tried to impede them. The French Customs would take their toll of the ivory, of course, but that could not be helped; but after that, a decent steamer again, and the sea, and home. It was an appetizing prospect.

But castles in the clouds have been built before, and often it is the unexpected that sets them trundling; and in this case such an ordinary occurrence as a tornado stepped into the reckoning and split this sighed-for edifice of success and prosperity with all completeness.

There had been no tornado to clear the atmosphere for nine whole days, and the country was unendurable accordingly. The air was stagnant with heat, and reeked with the lees of stale vegetation. The sky overhead was full of lurid haze, which darkened the afternoon almost to a twilight, and in the texture of this haze, indicated rather than definitely seen, was a constant nicker of lightning. It was the ordinary heat-lightning of the tropics, which is noiseless, but it somehow seemed to send out little throbs into the baking air, till, at times, to be alive was for a white man almost intolerable.

Under this discomfort, a predatory column was marching on from one captured village to another,

THE LITTLE ARMY COULD ONLY MARCH IN SINGLE FILE.

[*Page* 95.

whose possible store of ivory had so far not been gleaned. The road was the ordinary African bush-path, intensely winding and only foot-sole wide; the little army, with Kettle at its head, could only march in single file, and Clay, who brought up the straggling rear, sweated and panted quite half a mile behind his leader.

Every one knew the tornado was approaching, and both the worn and haggard white men and the sweating, malodorous blacks hoped for it with equal intensity. For be it known that the tropical tornado passes through the stale baked air at intervals, like some gigantic sieve, dredging out its surplus heat and impurities. The which is a necessity of Nature; else even the black man could not endure in those regions.

And in due time, though it lingered most cruelly in its approach, the tornado burst upon them, coming with an insane volley of rain and wind and sound, that filled the forests with crashings, and sent the parched earth flying in vicious mud-spirts. In a Northern country such a furious outburst would have filled people with alarm; but here, in the tropic wilderness, custom had robbed the tornado of its dignity; and no one was awed. Indeed the blacks fairly basked in its violence, turning their glistening bodies luxuriously under the great ropes of rain.

The march stopped at the first outbreak of the squall. Kettle bolted to a rock ahead of him, and squatted down in a dry lee, sucking up great draughts of the new cool air. There are times when a drop of five degrees of temperature can bring earthly bliss of a quality almost unimaginable. And there he stayed, philosophically waiting till the tornado should choose to blow itself out.

The wind had started with a roar and a sudden squall, reaching the full climax of its strength in a matter of thirty seconds, and then with equal hurry it ended, leaving the country it had scoured full of a fresh, cool, glistening calm. Kettle rose to his feet, shook his clothes into shape, and gave the order to start.

The black soldiers stepped out in his wake, and for half a mile he strode at their head through the new-made mud of the path. But then he was suddenly brought up all standing. Word had been tediously handed down the long straggling line of men that there had been an accident in the rear; that a great tree had fallen to the blast; and finally that "dem dokitar, he lib for die."

Swiftly Kettle turned, and worked his way back down the narrow lane of the path. The negroes he hustled against watched him with stupid stares, but he gave them little notice. Leaving out the facts that Clay was his only white companion and assistant, he had grown strangely to like the man, and the vague report of the accident filled him with more than dismay.

He had over a mile to go before he came upon the scene, and when he did get there he found that the first report had exaggerated. Clay was not dead, but he lay unconscious on the ground, pinned there by a great cotton-wood which had crashed down before the fury of the wind, and which had fallen across his right leg. To move the tree was an impossibility; but with a sailor's resourcefulness Kettle set his men to dig beneath it, so that the imprisoned leg might be released that way; and himself gave them a lead.

Clay, fortunately for himself, remained the whole

time in a state of blank unconsciousness, and at last he was released, but with his leg horribly mangled. A hammock had meanwhile been rigged, and in this he was carried back to the village from which they had set out. Kettle led the retreat in front of the hammock bearers. He left his force of soldiers and carriers to follow, or straggle, or desert, as they pleased. The occupation of ivory raiding had completely passed from his mind; he had forgotten his schemes of wholesale conversion; he had nothing but Clay's welfare left at his heart.

He got the wounded man under cover of one of the village huts, and there, with the help of stimulants, poor Clay's senses came back to him. He was lividly pale with pain and the shock, but he was game to the backbone, and made no especial complaint. Indeed, he was rather disposed to treat the whole thing humorously.

"All the result of having a musical ear," he explained. "I made the boy who carried it put my banjo in a hollow of that tree out of the wet, and when I saw the old stick was going to crash down, I made a grab for the 'jo, and got it right enough. Well, I wasn't sufficiently nippy in jumping out of the way, it seems, and as the old banjo's busted for good, I shall have to trouble you for a funeral march on the accordion, Skipper."

"Funeral be hanged!" said Kettle. "You're worth a whole cemetery full of dead men yet."

"Speaking as a doctor," said Clay cheerfully, "I may tell you that your unprofessional opinion is rot. Now, if I'd a brother sawbones here to perform amputation, I might have a chance—say, one in a thousand."

"Your leg ought to be cut off?"

"Just there, above the knee. That'll mortify in twenty hours from now. Thank the Lord I never wasted much morphia on the niggers. There's plenty in stock. So it won't worry me much."

"Look here," said Kettle, "I will cut that leg off for you."

"You! My good Skipper, you're a handy man, I know, but what the blazes do you know about amputation?"

"You've got to teach me. You can show me the tools to use, and draw diagrams of where the arteries come."

"By the powers, I've a great mind to. There's something pretty rich in giving an amputation lecture with one's own femorals as a subject."

"You'd better," said Kettle grimly, "or I shall cut it off without being taught. I like you a lot too well, my man, to let you die for want of a bit of help."

And so, principally because the grotesqueness of the situation appealed to his whimsical sense of humor, Clay forthwith proceeded to pose as an anatomy demonstrator addressing a class, and expounded the whole art of amputation, handling the utensils of the surgeon's craft with the gusto of an expert, and never by shudder or sigh showing a trace of the white feather. He carried the whole thing through with a genial gayety, pointing his sentences now with a quip, now with some roguish sparkle of profanity, and finally he announced that the lecture was complete and over, and then he nodded familiarly at his wounded limb.

"By-bye, old hoof!" he said. "You've helped carry the rest of me into some queer scrapes, one time and another. But we've had good times together, as

well as bad, you and I, and anyway, I'm sorry to lose you. And now, skipper," said he,"get off your coat and wade in. I've put on the Esmarch's bandage for you. Don't be niggardly with the chloroform —I've got a good heart. And remember to do what I told you about that femoral artery, and don't make a mistake there, or else there'll be a mess on the floor. Shake hands, old man, and good luck to your surgery; and anyway, thank you for your trouble."

I fancy that I have made it clear before that Captain Kettle was a man possessed not only of an iron nerve, but also of all a sailor's handiness with his fingers; but here was a piece of work that required all his coolness and dexterity. At home, on an operating table, with everything at hand that antiseptic surgery could provide, with highly trained surgeons and highly trained nurses in goodly numbers, it would have been a formidable undertaking; but there, among those savage surroundings, in that awful loneliness which a white man feels so far away from all his kin, it was a very different matter.

It makes me shiver when I think how that little sailor must have realized his risks and his responsibility. It was a situation that would have fairly paralyzed most men. But from what can be gathered from the last letter that the patient ever wrote, it is clear that Kettle carried out the operation with indomitable firmness and decision; and if indeed some of his movements were crude, he had grasped all the main points of his hurried teaching, and he made no single mistake of any but pedantic importance.

Clay woke up from the anaesthetic, sick, shaken, but still courageous as ever. "Well," he gasped,

"you've made a fine dot-and-go-one of me, Skipper, and that's a fact. When you chuck the sea, and get back to England, and set up in a snug country practice as general practitioner, you'll be able to look back on your first operation with pride."

Kettle, shaken and white, regarded him from a native stool in the middle of the hut. "I can't think," he said, "how any men can be doctors whilst there's still a crossing to sweep."

"Oh," said Clay, "you're new at it now, and a bit jolted up. But the trade has its points. I'll argue it out with you some day. But just at present I'm going to try and sleep. I'm a bit jolted up, too."

Now, it is a melancholy fact to record that Dr. Clay did not pull round again after his accident and the subsequent operation. To any one who knows the climate, the reason will be easily understood. In that heated air of Central Equatorial Africa, tainted with all manner of harmful germs, a scratch will take a month to heal, and any considerable flesh wound may well prove a death warrant. Captain Kettle nursed his patient with a woman's tenderness, and Clay himself struggled gamely against his fate; but the ills of the place were too strong for him, and the inevitable had to be.

But the struggle was no quick thing of a day, or even of a week. The man lingered wirily on, and in the mean while Kettle saw the marvellous political structure, which with so much labor and daring he had built up, crumbling to pieces, as it were, before his very eyes. A company of Arab slave-traders had entered the district, and were recapturing his subject villages one by one.

At the first attack runners came to him imploring help. It was useless to send his half-baked soldiers without going himself. They knew no other leader; there was not a negro among them fit to take a command; and he himself was tied. He said nothing to Clay, but just sent a refusal, and remained at his post.

Again and again came clamorous appeals for help against these new invaders, and again and again he had to give the same stubborn refusal. His vaunted New Republic was being split up again into its primitive elements; the creed of the South Shields chapel was being submerged under a wave of red-hot Mohammedanism; and the ivory, that hard-earned ivory, with all its delicious potentialities, was once more being lifted by alien raiders, and this time forever beyond his reach.

Clay got some inkling of what was going on, and repeatedly urged him to be off at once and put things straight in person. "Don't you worry about me, Skipper," he'd say. "I'll get along here fine by myself. Nobody'll come to worry me. And if they did, they'd let me alone. I'm far too unwholesome-looking to chop just now."

But Kettle always stolidly refused to leave him. Indeed, with difficulty (for he was at all times a painfully truthful man) he used to lie to his patient and say that there was no need for him to go at all; that everything was going on quite as they could wish; and that he was vastly enjoying the relaxation of a holiday.

But in sober fact things were going very much awry. And every day they got worse. Even his original bevy of troops, those he had brought up with him into the country on the stern-wheel launch,

seemed to grasp the fact that his star was in the descendant. There was no open mutiny, for they still feared him too much personally to dare that; but in the black unwatched nights they stole away from the village, and every day their numbers thinned, and the villagers followed their lead; and when the end came, the two lonely white men had the village to themselves.

Clay's last words were typical of him. Kettle, with devotional intent, had been singing some hymn to him, which he had composed as being suitable for the occasion. But the dying man's ears were dulled, and he mistook both air and words. "You're a good fellow to sing me that," he whispered. "I know you don't like striking up that sort of music. By Jove! I heard that song last at the Pav. Good old Piccadilly Circus."

And then a little later: "I say, Skipper. I'm close on the peg-out. There's a girl in Winchester——but hang her, anyway. No, you've been my best pal. You're to have all my share of the loot—the ivory, I mean. You savvy, I leave it to you in my last will and testament, fairly and squarely. And Skipper, I'm sorry I ragged you about your mug on those New Republic stamps. If ever a man deserved what he wanted in that line, you're—you're——"

The voice failed. "Yes?" said Kettle, and stooped nearer.

Clay feebly winked. "You're him," he whispered. "So long, old cock."

Captain Kettle buried his friend in the first gold of the next dawn under a magnolia tree, which was hung with sweet-scented blossoms, in the middle of the village. During the heat of the day he composed a copy of verses to his memory, and when the sun

had dropped somewhat, he went out with his knife to carve them on the tree above the grave.

It appeared that the village was not so completely deserted as seemed to the eye, or, at any rate, that he had been watched. On the newly turned earth was a chicken, which had been sacrificed in the orthodox fashion; and for once he beheld the sight without resentment.

He raised his hat to the dead, and "Doc," he said, "this hen-killing is bang against my principles, but I won't say anything now. I guess it's some nigger's way of showing respect to you, and, by James! you're a fellow that ought to be admired. If only it hadn't been for that tree falling down, there'd have been two men round here that would have left their mark on Africa, and you're one of them. Well, old man, you're gone, and I hope you're looking down this moment—or up, as the case may be—to read this bit of poetry I'm going to stick above your head. It's worth attention. It's about the best sample of rhyme I ever hoisted out."

CHAPTER V

THE LOOTING OF THE "INDIAN SHERIFF."

Captain Kettle dived two fingers into the bowl of odorous, orange-colored palm-oil chop, and fished out a joint suspiciously like a nigger baby's arm. He knew it was a monkey's; or at least he was nearly certain it was a monkey's; but he ate no more from that particular bowl. The tribe he was with were not above suspicion of cannibalism, and though their hospitality was lavish, it was by no means guaranteed as to quality.

The head-man noticed his action, and put a smiling question: "You no like dem climb-climb chop? Tooth him plenty sore?"

"No," said Kettle, "my teeth are all in good working order, daddy, thanks. But now you mention it, the monkey is a bit tough. Not been stewed long enough, perhaps."

The head-man gave an order, and presently a woman at the cooking fire outside brought another calabash into the hut, and set it at the little sailor's feet. The head-man examined and explained: "Dem's dug chop, too-plenty-much fine. You fit?"

"I fit," said Kettle; "that'll suit me down to the ground, daddy. Stewed duck is just the thing I like, and palm-oil sauce isn't half bad when you're used to it. I'll recommend your pub to my friends, old one-eye, when I get home."

He dipped his digits into the stew, and drew forth

a doubtful limb. He regarded it with a twitching nose and critical eye.

"Thundering heavy-boned duck this, of yours, daddy."

"Me no savvy?" said his host questioningly.

"I say dem dug he got big bone. He no fit for fly. He no say quack-quack."

"Oh, I savvy plenty," said the one-eyed man, smiling. "Dem not quack-quack dug, dem bow-wow dug. You see him bow-wow dis morning. You hit him with foot, so."

"Ugh," said Kettle, "dog stew, is it? Yes, I know the animal, if you say he's the one I kicked. I had watched the brute eating garbage about the village for half an hour, and then when he wanted to chew my leg, I hit him. Ugh, daddy, don't you bring on these delicacies quite so sudden, or I shall forget my table manners. African scavenger dog! And I saw him make his morning meal. Here, Missis, for Heaven's sake take this dish away."

The glistening black woman stepped forward, but the head-man stopped her. There was some mistake here. He had killed the best dog in the village for Captain Kettle's meal, and his guest for some fastidious reason refused to eat. He pointed angrily to the figured bowl. "Dug chop," said he. "Too-much-good. You chop him." This rejection of excellent food was a distinct slur on his ménage, and he was working himself up into passion. "You chop dem dug chop one-time," he repeated.

The situation was growing strained, and might well culminate in fisticuffs. But Captain Kettle, during his recent many months' sojourn as a lone white man in savage Africa, had acquired one thing which had never burdened him much before, and

that was tact. He did not openly resent the imperative tone of his host, which any one who had known him previously would have guessed to be his first impulse. But neither at the same time did he permit himself to be forced into eating the noxious meal. He temporized. With that queer polyglot called Coast English, and with shreds from a score of native dialects, he made up a tattered fabric of speech which beguiled the head-man back again into good humor; and presently that one-eyed savage squatted amicably down on his heels, and gave an order to one of his wives in attendance.

The lady brought Kettle's accordion, and the little sailor propped his back against the wattle wall of the hut, and made music, and lifted up his voice in song. The tune carried among the lanes and dwellings of the village, and naked feet *pad-padded* quickly up over dust and the grass; the audience distributed itself within and without the head-man's hut, and listened enrapt; and the head-man felt the glow of satisfaction that a London hostess feels when she has hired for money the most popular drawing-room entertainer of the day, and her guests condescend to enjoy, and not merely to exhibit themselves as *blases.*

But Captain Kettle, it must be confessed, felt none of the artist's pride in finding his art appreciated. He had always the South Shields chapel at the back of his mind, with its austere code and creed, and he felt keenly the degradation of lowering himself to the level of the play-actor; even though he was earning his bare existence—and had been doing all through the heart of barbarous Africa—by mumming and carolling to tribes whose trade was murder and cannibalism.

He felt an infinite pity for himself when he reflected that many a time nothing but a breakdown, or a loudly bawled hymn, or a series of twisted faces, had been the only thing which stood between him and the cooking fires. But there was no help for it. He was a fighting man, but he could not do battle with a continent; and so he had either to take the only course which remained, and lower himself (as he considered it) to the level of the music-hall pariah, and mouth and mow to amuse the mob, or else accept the alternative which even the bravest of men might well shrink from in dismay.

His travel through the black heart of this black continent may have been paralleled by that of other obscure heroes who voyaged from grim necessity and not for advertisement, but the history of it, as it was told me in his simple log-book style, far surpasses the wonder of any of those travels which find a place in published volumes. He had started, a completely destitute man, from a spot far up on the Haut Congo, amidst treacherous hostile population. He had not a friend in Africa, black or white. He had no resources save his tongue, his thews, an empty revolver, and his mother wit, and yet he had won a slow way down to the western seaboard through a hundred hostile tribes, where an army would have been eaten up, and a Marco Polo might well have failed.

It would suit my pleasure finely to write of this terrific journey, with its dangers, its finesses, and its infinite escapes; it would gratify me to the quick if I might belaud to the full of my appreciation the endurance, and the grand resourcefulness, of this little sailor cast so desperately out of his more

native element; but the account of the travel is reserved for the pen of Captain Kettle himself, and so the more professional scribe may not poach upon his territory.

I had it from his own lips that the perils of the way made him see the poetry of it all, and he said to himself that here was the theme for that great epic, which would be the *chef d'oeuvre* of his literary life. It is to be written in blank verse, with the hymns and secular songs he sang at each stop given in an appendix, and he confidently hopes that it will stand out as something conspicuous and distinct against the sombre background of prosaic travel books.

His arrival at the coast was an achievement that made him almost faint with joy. Xenophon and his ten thousand Greeks hailed the sea, we are told, with a mighty shout. But to them Thalassa was merely a way-mark, a sign that they were nearing home. To Kettle it was more, far more, although he could not define the relationship. He had dwelt upon the sea the greater part of his days; he had got his meagre living from her; and although at all times she had been infinitely hard and cruel to him, and he had cursed her day in and day out with all a seaman's point and fluency, she had wrapped herself into his being in a way he little guessed, till separation showed him the truth.

He had seen the glint of her through the trees as he entered this last village of his march, but the air was too dull with heat for him to catch so much as a whiff of her refreshing saltness, and for the present he could not go down to greet her. He was still the lonely troubadour, dressed in a native cloth around the loins, with a turban of rags upon

his head, and a battered accordion slung from his back, come in from afar to sing and pull faces for a dinner.

The meal, for reasons which have been stated, was not a success, but payment had to be rendered all the same. He sang with noise, and made antics such as experience had taught him would be acceptable; and the audience, to whom a concert of this kind was a rarity, howled to him to go on. There was no escape. He had to sing till he could sing no more. It was far on into the night when a couple of native *tom-tom* players rescued him. The musical appetites of the village had been whetted rather than appeased, and as no more could be got out of this wandering minstrel, why then they were quite ready to listen to local instruments and melody.

Dancing commenced, and the heat and the noise grew, and presently Kettle managed to slip away and walk out through the yam and manioc gardens, and the banana groves, to the uproarious beach beyond. He threw himself wearily down on the warm white sand, and when the great rollers swept in and crashed into noisy bellowing surf, the spindrift from it drove on him, and refreshed him luxuriously. It was almost worth going through all he had suffered to enjoy the pleasures of that greeting.

For long enough he filled his eye on the creaming fringes of the surf, and then he glanced over it at the purple plain of ocean which lay level and unruffled beyond. A great African moon glowed above it in the night, and the lonely vastness of it all gratified him like the presence of a friend. "You are a decent old puddle," he murmured to himself, "though I say it that's got precious little from

you beyond mud and slashing. It's good to be back in reach of the stink of you again."

He lay on where he was deep into the night, revelling in the companionship of the sea, till the many-colored land-crabs began to regard him as mere jetsam. He was not consciously thinking. He was letting his mind rest in an easy torpor; but from time to time he let his eyes range through the purple dark with a seaman's mechanical watchfulness. The noise of the *tom-toms* and the dancing from the village behind him had died away, and nothing but the sounds from the bush, and the din of the surf, remained to show that the world was alive. The moon, too, had been smothered by a cloud bank, and night lay huddled close round him, with a texture like black velvet.

Then, with a jump he was on his feet, and trembling violently. Another old friend was in his neighborhood—a steamer. Her masthead light had just twinkled into view. He got up and began walking nervously toward her along the hard, white sands. He saw her first in the northwest, coming from some port in the Bight of Biafra probably, and the odds were she was heading south along the Coast.

Presently he picked up her red port light. Yes, he admitted to himself with a sigh, she was making for one of the ports to southward, for Sette Camma perhaps, or Loango, or Landana, or Kabenda, and he calmed himself down with the discovery. Had she been heading north, he had it in him to have swum out to her through the surf and the sharks, and chanced being picked up. He was sick of this savage Africa which lay behind him. The sight of those two lights, the bright white, and the duller red, let him know how ravenous was his hunger to

see once more a white man and a white man's ship, and to feel the sway of a deck, and to smell the smells of oil, and paint, and Christian cookery, from which he had been for such a weary tale of days divorced.

The steamer drew on till she came a-beam, and the red port light was eclipsed, and "carrying no stern light," was Captain Kettle's comment. There was a small glow from her deck and two or three of her ports were lit, but for the most part she crept along as a mysterious black ship voyaging into a region of blackness. It was too dark to make out more than her bare existence, but Kettle took a squint at the Southern Cross, which hung low in the sky like an ill-made kite, to get her bearings, and so made note of her course, and from that tried to deduce her nationality.

From the way she was steering he reckoned she came from Batanga or Cameroons, which are in German territory, and so set her down as sailing originally from Marseilles or Hamburg, and anyway decided that she was not one of the Liverpool boats which carry all the West Coast trade to England. But as he watched, she seemed to slew out of her course. She lengthened out before him across the night, as her bows sheered in toward the land, till he saw her broadside on, and then she hung motionless as a black blot against the greater blackness beyond.

Captain Kettle summed the situation: "Rounded up and come to an anchor. There'll be a factory somewhere on the beach there. But I don't know, though. That one-eyed head-man said nothing about a factory, and if there was one, why doesn't she whistle to raise 'em up so's they'd be ready to

bring off their bit o' trade in the surf-boats when day breaks?"

A cloud slid away in the sky, and the moon shone out like the suddenly opened bulb of a dark lantern. The oily surface of the sea flashed up into sight, and on it sat the steamer—a picture in black and silver. She lay there motionless as the trees on the beach, and the reason for her state was clear. Her forefoot soared stiffly aloft till it was almost clear of the water; her stern was depressed; her decks listed to port till it was an acrobatic feat to make passage-way along them.

Captain Kettle whistled to himself long and dismally. "Piled her up," he muttered, "that's what her old man has done. Hit a half-ebb reef, and fairly taken root there. He's not shoved on his engines astern either, and that means she's ripped away half her bottom, and he thinks she'll founder in deep water if he backs her off the ground." A tiny spit of flame, pale against the moonlight, jerked out from under the awnings of the steamer's upper bridge. The noise of the shot came some time afterward, no louder than the cracking of a knuckle. "By James! somebody's getting his gun into use pretty quick. Well, it's some one else's trouble, and not mine, and I guess I'm going to stay on the beach, and watch, and not meddle." He frowned angrily as though some one had made a suggestion to him. "No, by James! I'm not one of those that seeks trouble unnecessarily."

But all the same he walked off briskly along the sand, keeping his eyes fixed on the stranded steamer. That some sort of a scuffle was going on aboard of her was clear from the shouts and the occasional pistol shots, which became louder as he drew more

near; and Captain Kettle, connoisseur as he was of differences of this sort on the high seas, became instinctively more and more interested. And at last when he came to a small canoe drawn up on the beach above high-water mark, he paused beside it with a mind loaded with temptation as deep as it would carry.

The canoe was a dug-out, a thing of light cotton-wood, with washboards forward to carry it through a surf. A couple of paddles and a calabash formed its furniture, and its owner probably lived in the village where he had sung for his dinner overnight. Of course, to borrow her—merely to borrow her, of course—without permission was——

Another splatter of pistol shots came from the steamer, and a yelping of negro voices. Captain Kettle hesitated no longer. He laid hands on the canoe's gunwale, and ran her down into the edge of the surf. He had barely patience to wait for a smooth, but, after three rollers had roared themselves into yeast and quietude, he ran his little craft out till the water was arm-pit deep, and then scrambled on board and paddled furiously.

But it is not given to the European to equal the skill of the black on African surf beaches, and, as might be expected, the next roller that swooped in overended the canoe, and sent it spinning like a toy through the broken water. But Captain Kettle had gained some way; and if he could not paddle the little craft to sea, he could at least swim her out; and this he proceeded to do. He was as handy as an otter in the water, and besides, there was something here which was dragging him to seaward very strongly. His soul lusted for touch with a steamer again with a fierceness which he did not own even

to himself. Even a wrecked steamer was a thing of kinship to him then.

He swam the dug-out through the last drench and backtow of the surf, rocked her clear from part of her watery load, and then, with a feeling of relief, clambered gingerly on board and baled the rest over the gunwale with his hands. It is not good to stay over-long in these seas which fringe the West African beaches, by reason of the ground shark which makes them his hunting-ground. And then he manned the paddle, knelt in the stern, and went the shortest way to the steamer which perched on the rock.

The moon was still riding in the sky, but burnt with a pale light now, as dawn had jumped up from behind the shore forests. All things were shown clearly. Among other matters, Kettle noted from trifles in her garnishing, which read clear as print to a seaman's eye, that the steamer was not French or German as he had guessed before, but hailed from his own native islands. Moreover, her funnel told him that she was not one of the two regular lines from Liverpool, which do all the commerce of the coast. But he had no time for fresh speculations just then as to her business. The scuffling on board had been growing more and more serious, and it was clear that the blacks of her complement were giving the whites more than they cared about.

Kettle knew enough of the custom of the Coast to be able to sum the situation. "Her Krooboys have broken out of hand," he commented. "That's what's the trouble. You come down here from England with just enough white men to handle your vessel to Sierra Leone, and then you ship Krooboys to work cargo and surf-boats, and do everything except steer, and as long as nothing happens, your

Krooboy is a first-class hand. Two cupfuls of rice and a bit of fish is all the grub he wants; he'll work sixteen hours a day without a grunt; and he'll handle a winch or a steam crane with any Geordie donkey-man that has been grounded in the shops. But just put your steamboat on the ground where he thinks she can't get off, and there's a different tune to play. He's got a notion that the ship's his, and the cargo's his, to loot as he likes, and if he doesn't get 'em both, he's equal to making trouble. Seems to me he's making bad trouble now."

By this time it was plain that the black men had got entire possession of the lower parts of the ship. The small handful of whites were on the top of the fiddley, and while most were fighting to keep the Africans back, a couple were frenziedly working to get a pair of davits swung outboard, and a lifeboat which hung from them lowered into the water. It was clear they had given up all hope of standing by the ship; and presently they got the boat afloat, and slid down to her in hurried clusters by the davit falls, and then unhooked and rowed away from the steamer's side in a skelter of haste. Coals and any other missile that came handy were showered upon them by the Krooboys who manned the rail, to which they replied with a few vicious revolver shots; and then the boat drew out of range.

Captain Kettle, in his clumsy canoe, paddled up close to her and nodded, and gave the boat's people a "good-morning." The greeting was quaintly enough out of place, but nobody seemed to notice that. Each party was too occupied in staring at the other. Those in the lifeboat saw a little lean European, naked to the waist, clad only in a turban and native cloth, and evidently (from the color of

his skin) long inured to that state. Kettle saw a huddle of fugitives, all of them scared, and many of them bloody with wounds.

The man who was steering the white boat, the steamer's mate he was, according to the gold lace on his cuff, spoke first.

"Well," he said, "you're a funny enough looking beachcomber. What do you want, anyway?"

Captain Kettle felt himself to redden all over under the tan of his skin. Neatness in clothes was always a strong point with him, and he resented the barbarism of his present get-up acutely. "If I wanted a job at teaching manners, I could find one in your boat, that's certain," was his prompt retort. "And when I'd finished with that, I could give some of you a lesson in pluck without much harm being done. I wonder if you call yourselves white men to let a crowd of niggers clear you out of your ship like that?"

"Now, look here, Robinson Crusoe," said the man at the steering oar, "our tempers are all filed up on the raw edge just now, and if you give much lip, this boat will be rowed over the top of your Noah's ark before you know what's hit it. You paddle back to your squaw and piccaninnies on the beach, Robinson, and don't you come out here to mock your betters when they're down on their luck. We've nothing to give you except ugly words, and you'll get them cheap."

"Well, Mr. Mate," said Kettle, "I haven't heard white man's English for a year, but if you can teach me anything new, I'm here to learn. I've come across most kinds of failure in my time, but a white man who lets himself be kicked off his ship by a parcel of Krooboys, and who disgraces Great Britain

by being a blooming Englishman, is a specimen that's new to me. But perhaps I'm making a mistake? Perhaps you're a Dutchman or a Dago that's learnt the language? Or perhaps, to judge from that cauliflower nose of yours, you're something that's escaped out of a freak museum? You haven't a photo about you by any chance? I'd like to send one home to South Shields. My Missis is a great hand at collecting curiosities which you only see in foreign parts."

The mate bent on the steering gear with sudden violence, turned the lifeboat's head with a swirl, and began sculling her toward the canoe. But a tall, thin man sitting beside him in the stern-sheets said something to him in an undertone, and the Mate reluctantly let the oar drag limp in the water, and sat himself down, and ostentatiously made ready to roll a cigarette.

"Now, look here," said the tall man, "I don't suppose you want to quarrel."

"I've been in quarrels before for the sheer fun of the thing," said Kettle, who was determined that at any rate no apology should come from his side.

"So have I," said the tall man, "but I've no time for empty amusement just now. I'm down here on business. I'm trying to start a new steamer line to work this Coast and get away the monopoly from the other companies. That boat stuck yonder —the *Indian Sheriff* she's called—is my venture, and she represents about all I've got, and she isn't underwritten for a sixpence. I've been going nap or nothing on this scheme, and at present it looks uncommon like nothing. What I'm anxious about now, is to see if I can't make some arrangement for salvage."

"I can understand it would be useful to you."

"It might be useful to others besides me. Now, there's you, for instance. I dare say you've got a nice little establishment ashore, and some simple comforts, and a bit of influence in your village. But you spoke about your wife at home in South Shields just now, and I make no doubt that if you'd got a tidy sum of money in your pocket you'd be as pleased as not to get home to her again?"

Captain Kettle was on the point of breaking out into explanations and disavowals, but a thought came to him, and he refrained.

"Well," he said, "I'm waiting to hear your offer."

"Here it is, then. You go ashore now, raise your village, bring off every nigger you can scare up, swamp the Krooboys on that steamboat and keep her from being looted, and I solemnly promise you 25 per cent. of her value and the value of what she has in her."

"Yes," said Kettle thoughtfully. "That's a square enough offer, and it's made before witnesses, and I believe the courts would make you stick to it."

"Ho!" grunted the Mate, "Robinson's a sea lawyer, is he? Courts, he talks about."

Kettle ignored the suggestion. "Should I know your name, sir?" he asked of the tall man.

"I'm Nicholson Sheriff. If you know Liverpool, you'll have heard of me."

"You were with Kevendales?"

"That's me. I left there two years ago, to start on my own."

"H'm," said the little sailor in the canoe. "I was master of one of Kevendale's ships once. It was me that had misfortune with the *Armenia*."

"By gum! are you Captain Kettle that piled up

the old *Atrocity* on that iceberg? I'm sorry to see you come down to this, Captain."

"Captain Kettle," said the sulky Mate, "that was in the Congo Pilot Service?"

"Yes," said Kettle.

"Then, Captain," said the Mate, "I take back what I said about you being Robinson Crusoe. You may have met with misfortune, but, by the Lord, you're a man all the way through. You've made the ports down there on the Congo just ring with the way you kept your end up with those beastly Belgians. And now when any Englishman goes ashore at Boma or Matadi or any place on the river, they're fit to eat him."

The compliment had its doubtful side, but Kettle bowed with pleasure. "Mr. Mate," he said, "I should have been more polite to you. I forgot you were a man who had just come through an anxious time."

"Anxious time! My holy grandmother! You should have just seen. It was my watch below when she took the ground, and I give you my word for it, there's deep water marked in the chart where she struck. Third mate had the bridge, and he rang for engines hard astern. Nothing happened. From the first moment she hit, the Krooboys got the notion she was their ship by all the rules of the Coast, and they played up to that tune like men. They bashed in the heads of the two engineers who tried to handle the reversing gear, and fairly took the ship below; and when the old man came out in his pyjamas and started his fancy shooting on deck, they just ran in on him and pulled him into kybobs.

"The second mate pegged out a week ago with

black-water fever. So there was only me and Mr. Sheriff here, and the third left that were worth counting." He wagged a stubby finger contemptuously at the rest of his boat's crew. "Half this crowd don't know enough English to take a wheel, and the rest of them come from happy Dutchland, where they don't make soldiers, bless their silly eyes. I can tell you I'm not feeling sweet about it myself. I left a bran new suit of clothes and an Accra finger-ring on that blame' ship."

"Well, never mind the rest of the tale now," said Sheriff. "Here we are kicked overboard, and glad enough to save our bare skins, I'll own. We won't go into the question of manning British ships with foreigners just now. What's interesting me is the fact that those Krooboys have got hatches off already, and are standing by the cranes and winches. I've seen them work cargo before all up and down the coast, and know the pace they can put into it, and if we don't move quick they'll scoff that ship clear down to the ceilings of her holds." A winch chain rattled, and a sling load of cloth bales swung up to one of her derrick sheaves. "My faith, look at that! They've begun to broach cargo by now, and there are some of the beggars setting to lower the surf-boats to ferry it on to the beach."

The Mate rapped out sulphurous wishes for the Krooboys' future state.

"Yes, yes," said Sheriff, "but we're wasting time. Come now, Captain, you heard my offer, and you seemed to like it. I'm waiting for you to fill your part of the bargain. Away with you ashore, and bring off your army and take possession."

"I'm afraid, sir," said Kettle honestly, "you've been taking a little too much for granted. I've got

no establishment ashore. I'm just what you see—a common tramp, or worse, seeing that I've been play-acting for my dinners of late. And as for any help those niggers ashore could give, why, I shouldn't recommend it. The one-eyed old son of a dog who's head-man, has served on ships according to his own telling, and he'll have the same notions about loot as your own Krooboys. The Coast nigger hereabouts has got a fancy that any ship on the beach is cumshaw for himself, and you'll not knock it out of him without some hard teaching. No, Mr. Sheriff, to call in that one-eyed head-man and his friends—who it makes me hot to think I had to sing and dance to not six hours back—would only pile up the work ahead of us. Much best tackle the ship as she is."

"What!" said Sheriff. "Do you mean to say we can retake her? You don't know what those boys are like. I tell you they were fair demons when we left, and they'll be worse now, because they are certain to have got liquor inside them by this. It's not a bit of use your counting on these deck-hands and stokers in the boat. They're not a penn'oth of use, the whole lot of them."

"Well," said Kettle diffidently, "I'd got my eye on that packet of cartridge beside you on the thwart. If they were four-fiftys———"

"They are—let's look—four—five—nought. Yes, well?"

Captain Kettle pulled a well-cleaned revolver out of his waist-cloth. "I've carried this empty for a whole year now, sir, but I don't think I've forgot my shooting."

"I can speak here," said the Mate. "I've heard of his usefulness that way on the Congo. When Cap-

tain Kettle lets off his gun, Mr. Sheriff, it's a funeral. By gum, if he's a way of getting the ship again, I'm on for helping. Look! There's that steward's boy, Tins, going into my room this minute. I've a suit of clothes there that have never been put on, and he'll have them for a cert if we don't look quick."

"Now then, Captain," said Sheriff, "if there's anything going to be done, get a move on you."

Kettle paddled the dug-out alongside, and stepped into the lifeboat. His eye glittered as he tore open the wrapping of the cartridges and reloaded his revolver. It was long since he had known the complacent feel of the armed man.

"Now," he said, "there's one more thing. I'm not in uniform, but I hold a master's ticket, and I've got to be skipper."

"You can take the berth for me," said the Mate. "I'll say outright it's a lot above my weight."

"And I've offered it to you already," said Sheriff. "Go on, man, and give your orders."

Captain Kettle's first desire was to get back to the steamer whence the boat had come, and this the mixed crew of foreigners at the oars had scruples about carrying out. But Kettle and the Mate got furiously at work on them with their hands, and in less than a minute the men were doing as they were bidden, except, that is, a trio who were too badly wounded to sit up, and who were allowed to wallow on the floor gratings.

The Mate straddled in the stern and steered her with an oar, and the white painted boat pulled heavily toward the stranded vessel. The Krooboys in possession were quick to see her coming. A mob of them gathered on the bridge deck, gibbering and

shouting, and threatening with their hands; and even before the boat drew within range, they commenced a vigorous fusilade of coal lumps. Kettle had all a cleanly man's dislike for these dirty missiles, and he halted the boat just beyond the limit of their fire, and stood up himself, and sighted the revolver over the crook of his left elbow.

He dropped one man, and the others raged at him. He dropped a second, and still with an impotent courage they stood their ground. He brought a third shrieking to the deck, and then, and not before, did the others turn to run, and he shot a fourth to hurry their going. Then he turned to the rowers in the lifeboat. "Give way, you thieves," he shouted at them; "set me aboard whilst the coast is clear.—Mr. Mate, round her up under those davit tackles."

Again the Krooboys tried to prevent the boarding, but again the fire of that terrible revolver drove them yelping to shelter, and the boat drew up with a bump and a swirl under the dangling ropes. Kettle clambered forward along the thwarts, and swarmed up one fall with a monkey's quickness, and the Mate, a man of wooden courage, raced him up the other. Sheriff could not climb; they had to haul him up the ship's side by brute force in a bowline; and providentially they were allowed to do this uninterrupted. The foreign crew of the lifeboat, limp with scare, would have been mere slaughter-pigs on board even if they could have been lured there, which was improbable, and so they were bidden to haul off out of shot, and wait till they were needed.

Now there was no question here of risking a hand-to-hand encounter. The Krooboys on board mustered quite fifty head, and most of them were men of

enormous physical strength. So the three invaders went into the chart-house, from the ports of which they could command the bridge deck and the main fore deck, and shot the door-bolts by way of making themselves secure. The walls were of iron, and the roof was of iron; the place was a perfect stronghold in its way; and as there was no chance of its being stormed without due notice, they tacitly called a halt to recover breath.

"Here," said Sheriff, "is the poor old skipper's whisky. I guess a second mate's nip all round will do us no harm."

"Here," said Kettle, "are the old man's Canary cigars, nice and black and flavory, and I guess one of them's more in my line, sir, thanking you all the same. I haven't come across a Christian smoke for more dreary months than I care to think about."

The Mate was peering through one of the forward ports. "There's the door of my room wide open," he grunted. "I bet those new clothes of mine are gone. They're just the thing to take a nigger's eye —good thick blue broadcloth."

Captain Kettle wiped the perspiration from his forehead with a bare, sinewy arm. "Now," he said, "enough time's been wasted. We must keep those toughs on the move, or they'll find leisure to think, and be starting some fresh wickedness."

"If we go out of this chart-house," said Sheriff doubtfully, "they'll swamp us by sheer weight. You must remember we've only got two pistols, yours and mine. The poor old skipper's is lost."

"I'm going to try what a little quiet talking-to will do first, sir. I used to be a bit useful with my tongue, if I haven't lost the trick. But before that, I'm going to borrow this white drill coat and pants

of your late old man's, if you don't mind. You'd hardly think it, sir, if you knew the trials I've gone through in that beastly Africa, but I believe it's the want of a decent pair of trousers that's hurt me more than anything."

Captain Kettle dressed himself with care, and put on a white-covered uniform cap; and then, happening to see a pair of scissors, he took them up and trimmed his beard before the glass. Sheriff looked on at these preparations with fidgeting impatience, and from without there was a clamor of negro voices taking counsel. But the little sailor was not to be hurried. He went through his toilet with solemn deliberation, and then he opened the chart-house door and went out beneath the baking sunshine of the bridge-deck beyond.

A cluster of Krooboys stood at the further end of it, cackling with talk, and at sight of him they called their friends on the main deck below, who began to come up as fast as they could get foot on the ladders. They showed inclinations for a rush, but Kettle held up his left hand for them to keep back, and they obeyed the order. They saw that vicious revolver gripped in his right fingers, and they respected its powers.

He addressed them with a fine fluency of language. He had a good command of sailor's English, and also of Coast English, both of which are specially designed for forcible comment; and he knew, moreover, scraps from a score of native dialects, which, having Arabic for a groundwork, are especially rich in those parts of speech which have the highest vituperative value. The black man is proverbially tough, and a whip, moral or physical, which will cut the most hardened of whites to ribbons, will

leave him unmoved. An artist in words may rail at him for an hour without making him flicker an eyelash, or a Yankee mate might hammer him with a packing-case lid (always supposing there was no nail in it) for a like period without jolting from him so much as a cry or a groan. And so I think it speaks highly for Captain Kettle's powers when, at the end of three minutes' talk, he caused many of those Krooboys to visibly wince.

You cannot touch a Krooboy's feelings by referring insultingly to his mother, because he has probably very dim recollections of the lady; you can not rile him by gibing comments on his personal appearance; but still there are ways of getting home to him, and Kettle knew the secret. "You make fight-palaver," he said, "you steal, you take ship, you drink cargo gin, and you think your *juj-u* fine *ju-ju*. But my *ju-ju* too-plenty-much better, and I fit for show it you again if dis steal-palaver no stop one-time."

They began to move threateningly toward him. "Very well," he said, "then I tell you straight; you no fit to be called black boys. You bushmen. Bah! you be bushmen."

The maddened Krooboys ran in, and the wicked revolver spoke out, and then Kettle nipped into the deck-house and slammed the door to on his heels. The black ape-like faces jabbered and mowed at the window ports, and brawny arms were thrust in, grappling viciously, but the Mate drew out camp-stools from a locker, and with these the three white men stabbed and hit at every face or arm which showed itself. There was no more shooting, and there was no need for it. By sheer weight of blows the whites kept the enemy from climbing through the windows, and so long as the windows were not

stormed, the iron house was safe to them. And presently one of the head-men blew his boatswain's whistle, and the attack drew off.

Promptly Kettle reloaded his revolver and stepped out into the open. "Now," he said, "you seen my *ju-ju*? You savvy him too-big *ju-ju*? You want any more of it? No. Then get away aft with you. You hear? You lib for bottom deck back there, one-time." He rushed at them, one slight, slim, white-clad white man against all that reeking, shining mob, and they struggled away before him in grotesque tumblings and jostlings, like a flock of sheep.

But at the break of the deck he paused and looked below him, and the fight all dropped away from his face. No. 3 hatch lay open before him, with the covers thrown here and there. From it was creeping up a thin blue smoke, with now and then a scarlet trail of flame. Here was a complication.

"So you gluttonous, careless brutes have set fire to her, have you? Here, who was in the engine room?"

Discipline was coming back. A man in black trousers, with a clout round his neck, stepped out.

"You? Well, slip below, and turn steam into the donkey."

"Steam no lib, sar. Cranes die when we try to work him just now."

"Oh, you holy crowd of savages! Well, if we can't use the hose, you must hand buckets—and sharp, too. That fire's gaining. Now then, head-men, step out."

"I second head-man, sar."

"I head-man, sar."

"Get buckets, tubs, tins—anything that'll hold

water, and look sharp. If you boys work well now, I'll overlook a lot that's been done. If you don't, I'll give you fits. Try and get below, some of you, and pull away what's burning. Probably you'll find some of your dear relations down there, drunk on gin and smoking pipes. You may knock them on the head if you like, and want to do a bit more murder. They deserve it."

But though half a dozen of the Krooboys, who were now thoroughly tamed, tried to get down the hatch, the fire was too strong for them. Even the water when it came did little to check the burning, for though it sent up great billows of steam, the flames shot out fiercer and higher every moment. In that sweltering climate it does not take very much inducement to make a fire settle down thoroughly to work, once it gets anything like a tolerable start.

To add to the trouble, news of the wreck had been carried to the village behind the beach where Captain Kettle had sung for his lodging over-night, and the one-eyed head-man there and his friends were coming off to share in the spoil as fast as canoes could bring them. They, too, would have their theories as to the ownership of wrecked cargoes on the West African Coast, and as they were possessed of trade guns, they were not like to forego what they considered their just rights without further fighting.

But as it happened, a period was put to the scene on the steamer with considerable suddenness. Sheriff, who had been making sure that there were no Krooboys lurking forward who could take them from the rear, came up and looked upon the fire with a blanched face. "Excuse me, Skipper," he

said, and turned and bawled for the lifeboat to come alongside.

"No hurry for that yet," said Kettle, angrily. "Don't scare the men, sir. And don't you give orders without my sanction. You made me Captain here, and, by James! Captain I'll be. We're handicapped for want of the hose, but we're going to try and get this fire under without. Anyway, there's no question of leaving the ship yet."

"Good God, man, don't niggle about that now. I know what I'm saying. There's eight tons of powder in that hold."

"And we may be blown up against the sky as a thin kind of rain any minute? Well, sir, you're owner, and as you seem to have acted as purser on board, you ought to know. But hadn't we better ask the Mate for his cargo-book first, so as to make sure?"

He turned and looked, but Sheriff had gone, and was sliding down into the lifeboat which had come alongside. "Well, I don't like leaving the ship, and I suppose for that matter he wouldn't either, being owner, and being uninsured. But as Mr. Sheriff's gone in such a blazing hurry, it's probably time for me to go too, if I'm to land home any time in South Shields again." He hailed the lower deck with a sharp order. "You boys, there, knock off. Knock off work, I say, and throw down your buckets. There's powder stowed down below, and it'll be going off directly. Gunpowder, you savvy, shoot-powder, go *fizz—boosh—bang*!"

There was a sharp clatter of understanding and explanation, but no movement. The African is not great at making deductions. Captain Kettle had to give a definite order. "Now, overboard with you,

all hands, and lib for beach. No time for lower boats. You all fit for swim."

They took the hint, and began leaping the bulwark rail like a swarm of black frogs. "Good-by, boys," he said, in valediction. "You'll find it cheaper to be good and virtuous next time. You haven't stay enough in you for a real good fight." And then he went to where the davits dangled over the water, and slid down to the boat, while the frightened crew cursed him aloud for keeping them waiting.

Not much was said as they rowed away. The all-nation rowers were openly terrified; the Mate had all his attention used up in steering to a hair; and Sheriff sat with his shoulders humped beside his ears in the position of a man who expects a blow. Captain Kettle held his peace. He knew that mere words could not urge the sweating crew to heavier effort, and he puffed at his treasured cigar as any smoker would who had been divorced from tobacco for so many a month, and does not know when he will meet with his next indulgence.

And in due time the powder was fired, and the steamer was turned into a vast volcano of steam and smoke and flame, which vomited iron and human limbs, and which sent forth an air blast which drove the boat before it like the hurricane of a tornado. And then the *debris* from the sky foamed down into the water, and then there was a long, long silence. Save for some inconsiderable flotsam, the steamer and all that was in her had vanished eternally. The canoes from the village were paddling for the beach again. They were alone on a lonely sea. No man seemed to have a thought he wished to share.

The Mate was the first to speak. He patted a bundle whose outer housing was a pillow-case, which lay on the thwart beside him. "Well," he said, "it's been a close thing. I darn nearly lost those new clothes of mine."

"It might have been worse," said Sheriff; "we might well all have been killed. But as it is," he added with a sigh, "we've merely got to start fresh from the bottom again. Anyway, Kettle, I'm obliged to you for what you have done."

The little sailor frowned. "It's kind of you, sir, to say that. But I hate being beaten. And it's no excuse to say I did my best. I hadn't figured on that fire and the powder, and that's a fact."

"I wonder," said the Mate thoughtfully, "which of those beggars scoffed that gold zodiac ring of mine. That steward's boy, Tins, I expect. Took the ring and left the new blue suit. Well, by gum, they're a funny lot, those boys."

CHAPTER VI

THE WIRE-MILKERS

"Look here," said Sheriff, "you compel me to be brutal, but the fact is, they've had enough of you here in Lagos. So far as I can see, you've only got the choice of two things. You can have a free passage home to England as a Distressed Seaman by the next steamer, and you know what that means. The steamer gets paid a shilling a day, and grubs and berths you accordingly, and you earn your 'bacca money by bumming around the galley and helping the cook peel spuds. Or else, if you don't like that, you can do the sensible thing, and step into the billet I offer you."

"By James!" said Kettle, "who's going to turn me out of Lagos; tell me that, sir?"

"Don't get wrathful with me. I'm only telling you what you'll find out to be the square truth if you stay on long enough. The authorities here will be equal to handling you if you try to buck against them."

"But, sir, they have no right to touch me. This isn't French territory, or German, or any of those clamped-down places. The town's as English as Liverpool, and I'm a respectable man."

"The trouble of it is," said Sheriff drily, "they say you are not. There are a limited number of white men here in Lagos—perhaps two hundred all told—and their businesses and sources of income are all

more or less visible to the naked eye. Yours aren't. In the language of the—er—well—the police court, you've no visible means of subsistence, and yet you always turn out neat, and spruce, and tidy; you've always got tobacco; and apparently you must have meals now and again, though I can't say you've got particularly fat on them."

"I've never been a rich man, sir. I've never earned high wages—only once as much as fifteen pounds a month—and there's the missis and the family to provide for; and, as a consequence, I've never had much to spend on myself. It would surprise a gentleman who's been wealthy like you, Mr. Sheriff, to see the way I can make half-a-crown spin out."

"It surprises me to see how you've made nothing at all spin out," said Sheriff; "and as for the Lagos authorities I was speaking about, it's done more; it's made them suspicious. Hang it, man, be reasonable; you must see they are bound to be suspicious."

Captain Kettle's brown face grew darker in tint, and he spoke with visible shame. "I've come by a living, sir, honest, but I couldn't bear it to be told aloud here to all the world how it was done. I may be down, Mr. Sheriff, but I have my pride still."

Sheriff spread his hands helplessly. "That's no kind of answer," he said. "They won't let you continue to stay here in Lagos on an explanation like that. Come now, Kettle, be sensible: put yourself in the authorities' place. They've got a town to administer—a big town—that not thirty years ago was the most murderous, fanatical, rowdy dwelling of slave-traders on the West Coast of Africa. To-day, by dint of careful shepherding, they've reduced it to a city of quiet respectability, with a

smaller crime rate than Birmingham; and in fact made it into a model town suitable for a story-book. You don't see the Government much, but you bet it's there, and you bet it isn't asleep. You can bet also that the nigger people here haven't quite forgotten the old days, and would like to be up to a bit of mischief every now and again, just for old association's sake, which of course the Government is quite aware of.

"Now there's nothing that can stir up niggers into ructions against a white man's government better than a white man, as has been proved tons of times already, and here are you already on the carpet quite equal to the job. I don't say you are up to mischief, nor does the Government, but you must see for yourself that they'd be fools if they didn't play for safety and ship you off out of harm's way."

"I must admit," said Kettle ruefully, "that there's sense in what you say, sir."

"Are you going to give a free and open explanation of your means of employment here in Lagos, and earn the right to stay on openly, or are you going to still stick to the mysterious?"

The little sailor frowned. "No, sir," he said; "as I told you before, I have my pride."

"Very well, then. Now, are you going to be the Distressed Seaman, and be jeered at all the run home as you cadge round for your 'baccy money, or are you going to do the sensible thing, and step into this billet I've put in your way?"

"You corner me."

"I'm glad to hear it, and let me tell you it hasn't been for want of trying. Man, if I hadn't liked you, I would not have taken all this trouble to put a soft thing ready to your hand."

"I believe you want service out of me in return, sir," said Kettle stiffly.

Sheriff laughed. "You aren't the handiest man in the world to get on with, and if I hadn't been an easy-tempered chap I should have bidden you go to the deuce long enough ago. Of course, I want something out of you. A man who has just lost a fortune, and who is down on his luck like I am, can't afford to go in for pure philanthropy without any possible return. But, at the same time, I'm finding you a job at fifty pound a month with a fortnight's wages paid in advance, and I think you might be decently grateful. By your own telling, you never earned so much as four sovereigns a week before."

"The wages were quite to my taste from the beginning, sir; don't think me ungrateful there. But what I didn't like was going to sea without knowing beforehand what I was expected to do. I didn't like it at first, and I refused the job then; and if I take it now, being, as you say, cornered, you're not to understand that it's grown any the tastier to me."

"We shouldn't pay a skipper a big figure like that," said Sheriff drily, "if we didn't want something a bit more than the ordinary out of him. You may take it you are getting fifteen pounds a month as standard pay, and the extra thirty-five for condescending to sail with sealed orders. But what I told you at first I repeat now: I've got a partner standing in with me over this business, and as he insists on the whole thing being kept absolutely dark till we're away at sea, I've no choice but to observe the conditions of partnership."

Some thirty minutes later than this, Mr. Sheriff

got out of his 'rickshaw on the Marina and went into an office and inquired for Mr. White. One of the colored clerks (who, to do credit to his English education, affected to be utterly prostrated by the heat) replied with languor that Mr. White was upstairs; upon which Sheriff, mopping himself with a handkerchief, went up briskly.

White, a gorgeously handsome young Hebrew, read success from his face at once. "I can see you've hooked your man," said he. "That's good business; we couldn't have got another as good anywhere. Have a cocktail?"

"Don't mind if I do. It's been tough work persuading him. He's such a suspicious, conscientious little beggar. Shout for your boy to bring the cocktail, and when we're alone, I'll tell you about it."

"I'll fix up your drink myself, old man. Where's the swizzle-stick? Oh, here, behind the Angostura bottle. And there's a fresh lime for you—got a basket of them in this morning. Now you yarn whilst I play barmaid."

Mr. Sheriff tucked his feet on the arms of a long-chair and picked up a fan. He sketched in the account of his embassage with humorous phrase.

The Hebrew had been liberal with his cocktail. He said himself that he made them so beautifully that no one could resist a second; and so, with a sigh of gusto, Sheriff gulped down number two and put the glass on the floor. "No," he said; "no more. They're heavenly, I'll grant, but no more. We shall want very clear heads for what's in front of us, and I'm not going to fuddle mine for a commencement. I can tell you we have been very nearly wrecked already. It was only by the skin of my teeth I

managed to collar Master Kettle. I only got him because I happened to know something about him."

"Did you threaten to get him into trouble over it? What's he done?"

"Oh, nothing of that sort. But the man's got the pride of an emperor, and it came to my knowledge he'd been making a living out of fishing in the lagoon, and I worked on that. Look out of that window; it's a bit glary with the sun full on, but do you see those rows of stakes the nets are made fast on? Well, one of those belongs to Captain Owen Kettle, and he works there after dark like a native, and dressed as one. You know he's been so long living naked up in the bush that his hide's nearly black, and he can speak all the nigger dialects. But I guessed he'd never own up that he'd come so low as to compete with nigger fishermen, and I fixed things so that he thought he'd have to tell white Lagos what was his trade, or clear out of the colony one-time. It was quite a neat bit of diplomacy."

"You have got a tongue in you," said White.

"When a man's as broke as I am, and as desperate, he does his best in talk to get what he wants. But look here, Mr. White, now we've got Kettle, I want to be off and see the thing over and finished as soon as possible. It's the first time I've been hard enough pushed to meddle with this kind of racket, and I can't say I find it so savory that I'm keen on lingering over it."

The Jew shrugged his shoulders. "We are going for money," he said. "Money is always hard to get, my boy, but it's nice, very nice, when you have it."

Keen though Sheriff was to get this venture put to

the trial, brimming with energy though he might be, it was quite out of the question that a start could be made at once. A small steamer they had already secured on charter, but she had to be manned, coaled, and provisioned, and all these things are not carried out as quickly in Lagos as they would be in Liverpool, even though there was a Kettle in command to do the driving. And, moreover, there were cablegrams to be sent, in tedious cypher, to London and elsewhere, to make the arrangements on which the success of the scheme would depend.

The Jew was the prime mover in all this cabling. He had abundance of money in his pocket, and he spent it lavishly, and he practically lived in the neighborhood of the telegraph office. He was as affable as could be; he drank cocktails and champagne with the telegraph staff whenever they were offered; but over the nature of his business he was as close as an oyster.

A breath of suspicion against the scheme would wreck it in an instant, and, as there was money to be made by carrying it through, the easy, lively, boisterous Mr. White was probably just then as cautious a man as there was in Africa.

But preparations were finished at last, and one morning, when the tide served, the little steamer cast off from her wharf below the Marina, and steered for the pass at the further side of the lagoon.

The bar was easy, and let her through with scarcely so much as a bit of spray to moisten the dry deck planks, and Sheriff pointed to the masts of a branch-boat which had struck the sand a week before, and had beaten her bottom out and sunk in

ten minutes, and from these he drew good omens about this venture, and at the same time prettily complimented Kettle on his navigation.

But Kettle refused to be drawn into friendliness. He coldly commented that luck and not skill was at the bottom of these matters, and that if the bar had shifted, he himself could have put this steamer on the ground as handily as the other man had piled up the branch-boat. He refused to come below and have a drink, saying that his place was on the bridge till he learned from observation that either of the two mates was a man to be trusted. And, finally, he inquired, with acid formality, as to whether his employers wished the steamer brought to an anchor in the roads, or whether they would condescend to give him a course to steer.

Sheriff bade him curtly enough to "keep her going to the s'uth'ard," and then drew away his partner into the stifling little chart-house. "Now," he said, "you see how it is. Our little admiral up there is standing on his temper, and if he doesn't hear the plan of campaign, he's quite equal to making himself nasty."

"I don't mind telling him some, but I'm hanged if I'm going to tell him all. There are too many in the secret already, what with you and the two in London; and as I keep on telling you, if one whiff of a suspicion gets abroad, the whole thing's busted, and a trap will be set that you and I will be caught in for a certainty."

"Poof! We're at sea now, and no one can gossip beyond the walls of the ship. Besides Kettle is far too staunch to talk. He's the sort of man who can be as mum as the grave when he chooses. But if you persist in refusing to trust him, well, I tell you

that the thought of what he may be up to makes me frightened."

"Now look here, my boy," said White, "you force me to remind you that I'm senior partner here, and to repeat that what I say on this matter's going to be done. I flatly refuse to trust this Kettle with the whole yarn. We've hired him at an exorbitant fee—bought him body and soul, in fact, as I've no doubt he very well understands—and to my mind he's engaged to do exactly as he's told, without asking questions. But as you seem set on it, I'll meet you here; he may be told a bit. Fetch him down."

But as Kettle refused to come below, on the chilly plea of business, the partner went out under the awnings of the upper bridge, where the handsome White, with boisterous, open-hearted friendliness, did his best to hustle the little sailor into quick good humor.

"Don't blame me, Skipper, or Sheriff here either, for the matter of that, for making all this mystery. We're just a couple of paid agents, and the bigger men at the back insisted that we should keep our mouths shut till the right time. There's nothing wrong with this caution, I'm sure you'll be the first to say. You see they couldn't tell from that distance what sort of man we should be able to pick up at Lagos. I guess they never so much as dreamed that we'd have the luck to persuade a chap like you to join."

"You are very polite, sir," said Kettle formally.

"Not a bit of it. I'm not the sort of boy to chuck civility away on an incompetent man. Now look here, Captain. We're on for making a big pile in a very short time, and you can stand in to finger

your share if you'll only take your whack of the work."

"There's no man living more capable of hard work than me, sir, and no man keener to make a competence. I've got a wife that I'd like to see a lot better off than I've ever been able to make her so far."

"I'm sure Mrs. Kettle deserves affluence, and please the pigs she shall have it."

"But it isn't every sovereign that might be put in her way," said the sailor meaningly, "that Mrs. Kettle would care to use."

"I guess I find every sovereign that comes to my fingers contains twenty useful shillings."

"I will take your word for it, sir. Mrs. Kettle prefers to know that the few she handles are cleanly come by."

Mr. White gritted his handsome teeth, shrugged his shoulders, and made as if he intended to go down off the bridge. But Sheriff stopped him. "We'd better have it out," Sheriff suggested; "as well now as later."

"Put it in your own words, then. I don't seem able to get started. You," he added significantly, "know as well as I do what to say."

"Very well. Now, look here, Kettle. This mystery game has gone on long enough, and you've got to be put on the ground floor, like the rest of us. Did you ever dabble in stocks?"

"No, sir."

"But you know what they are?"

"I've heard the minister I sit under ashore give his opinion from the pulpit on the Stock Exchange, and those who do business there. The minister of our chapel, sir, is a man I always agree with."

This was sufficiently unpromising, but Sheriff went doggedly on. "I see your way of looking at it: the whole crowd of stock operators are a gang of thieves that no decent man would care to touch?"

"That's much my notion."

"And they are quite unworthy of protection?"

"They can rob one another to their heart's content for all I care."

Sheriff smiled grimly. "That's what I wanted to hear you say, Captain. This cruise we are on now is not exactly a pleasure trip."

"I guessed that, of course, from the pay that was offered."

"What we are after is this: the Cape to England telegraph cable stops at several places on the road, and we want to get hold of one of the stations and work it for our own purposes for an hour or so. If we can do that, our partners in London will bring off a speculation in South African shares that will set the whole lot of us up for life."

"And who pays the piper? I mean where will the money for your profit come from?"

White was quicker than Sheriff to grasp the situation. "From inside the four walls of the Stock Exchange. S'elp me, Captain, you needn't pity them. There are lots of men there, my friends too, who would have played the game themselves if they had been sharp enough to think of it. We have to be pretty keen in the speculation business if we want to make money out of it."

Captain Kettle buttoned his coat, and stepped to the further end of the bridge with an elaborate show of disgust. "You are on the Stock Exchange yourself, sir?"

"Er—connected with it, Captain."

"YOU INSOLENT LITTLE BLACKGUARD, YOU DARE TO SPEAK TO ME LIKE THAT!"

[*Page* 143.

"I can quite understand our minister's opinion of stock gamblers now. Perhaps some day you may hear it for yourself. He's a great man for visiting jails and carrying comfort to the afflicted."

"By gad!" said White, "you insolent little blackguard, you dare to speak to me like that!"

"I use what words I choose," said Kettle, truculently. "I'd have said the same to your late King Solomon if I hadn't liked his ways; but if I was pocketing his pay, I should have carried out his orders all the same." He bent down to the voice hatch, and gave a bearing to the black quartermaster in the wheel-house below, and the little steamer, which had by this time left behind her the vessels transhipping cargo in the roads, canted off on a new course to the southward.

"Hullo," said Sheriff, "what's that mean? Where are you off to now?"

Kettle mentioned the name of a lonely island standing by itself in the Atlantic.

But Sheriff and the Jew were visibly startled. Mr. Sheriff mopped at a very damp forehead with his pocket handkerchief. "Have you heard anything then?" he asked, "or did you just guess?"

"I heard nothing before, or I should not have signed on for this trip, sir. But having come so far I'm going to earn out my pay. What's done will not be on my conscience. The shipmaster's blameless in these matters; it's the owner who drives him that earns his punishment in the hereafter; and that's sound theology."

"But how did you guess, man, how did you know where we were bound?"

"A shipmaster knows cable stations as well as he knows owners' agents' offices ashore. Any fool who

had been told your game would have put his finger on that island at once. That's the loneliest place where the cable goes ashore all up and down the coast, and it isn't British, and what more could you want?"

With these meagre assurances, Messieurs Sheriff and White had to be content, as no others were forthcoming. Captain Kettle refused to be drawn into further talk upon the subject, and the pair went below to the stuffy little cabin more than a trifle disconsolate. "Well, here's the man you talked so big about," said White, bitterly. "As soon as we get out at sea, he shows himself in his true colors. Why, he's a blooming Methodist. But if he sells us when it comes to the point, and there's a chance of my getting nabbed, by gad I'll murder him like I would a rat."

"If he offers a scrimmage," said Sheriff, "you take my tip, and clear out. He's a regular glutton for a fight; I know he's armed; and he could shoot the buttons off your coat at twenty yards. No, Mr. White; make the best or the worst of Captain Kettle as you choose, but don't come to fisticuffs with him, or as sure as you are living now, you'll finish out on the under side then. And mind, I'm not talking by guess-work. I know."

"I shall not stick at much if this show's spoiled. Why, the money was as good as in our pockets, if he hadn't cut up awkward."

"Don't throw up the sponge till some one else does it for you. Look here, I know this man Kettle a lot better than you do. He wants the pay very badly. And when it comes to sticking up the cable station, you'll see him do the work of any ten like us. I tell you, he's a regular demon when it comes to a scuffle."

It was in this attitude, then, that the three principal members of the little steamer's complement voyaged down over those warm tropical seas which lay between Lagos and the isle of their hopes and fears. Two of them kept together, and perfected the detail of their plans for use in every contingency; but the other kept himself icily apart, and for an occupation, when the business of the ship did not require his eye, wrapped himself up in the labor of literary production. He even refused to partake of meals at the same table with his employers.

The island first appeared to them as a huddle of mountains sprouting out of the sea, which grew green as they came more near, and which finally showed great masses of foliage growing to the crown of the splintered heights, with a surf frilling the bays and capes at their foot. There was a town in the hug of one of these bays, and toward it the little steamer rolled as though she had been an ordinary legitimate trader. She brought up to an anchor in the jaws of the bay, half-way between the lighthouse and the rectangular white building on the further beach, and after due delay, a negro doctor, pulled up by a surf-boat full of other negroes, came off and gave her pratique.

The rectangular white building, standing in the sea breeze by itself away from the town beyond, was the cable station, but for the present they faced it with their backs. Kettle had seen it before; the other two acted as though it were the last thing to trouble their minds. There was no going ashore for any of them yet; indeed, the less they advertised their personal identity, the more chance there was of getting off untraced afterward.

Night fell with such suddenness that one could

almost have imagined the sun was permanently extinguished. Round the rim of the bay lights began to kindle, and presently (when the wind came off the land) strains of music floated out to them.

"Some saint's day," Sheriff commented.

"St. Agatha's," said Kettle with a sigh.

"Hello, Kettle. I thought you were a straight-laced chapel goer. What have you to do with saints and their days?"

"I was told that one once, sir, and I can't help remembering it. You see the date is February 5th, and that's my eldest youngster's birthday."

Sheriff swore. "I wish you'd drop that sort of sentimental bosh, Skipper; especially now. I want to get this business over first, and then, when I go back with plenty in my pocket, I can begin to think of family pleasures and cares again. Come now, have you thought out what we can do with the steamer after we've finished our job here?"

"Run up with the coast and sink her, and then go ashore in the surf-boat at some place where the cable doesn't call, and leave that as soon as possible for somewhere else."

"It will be a big saving of necks," said Kettle drily. "Why sir, you've been a steamer-owner in your time, and you must know how we're fixed. You've given up your papers here, and you're known. You can't go into another port in the whole wide world without papers, and as far as forging a new set, why that's a thing that hasn't been done this thirty years outside a story-book."

Mr. White came up to hear. "I don't see that," he said.

"You fellows don't understand everything in Jerusalem," said Kettle, with a cheerful insult, and

walked away. Captain Kettle regarded Sheriff as a gull, and pitied him accordingly; but White he recognized as principal knave, and disliked him accordingly.

But when the start was made for the raid, some hour and a half before the dawn, Kettle was not backward in fulfilling his paid-for task. Himself he saw a surf-boat lowered into the water and manned by black Krooboy paddlers; himself he saw his two employers down on the thwarts, and then followed them; and himself he sat beside the headman who straddled in the stern sheets at the steering oar, and gave him minute directions.

The boat was avoiding the bay altogether. She was making for the strip of sand in front of the cable station, and except when she was shouldered up on the back of a roller, the goal was out of sight all the time.

"There 's a rare swell running, and it's a mighty bad beach to-night," Kettle commented. "I hope you gentlemen can swim, for the odds are you'll have to do it inside the next ten minutes."

"If we are spilt getting ashore," said White, "how do you say we'll get off again?"

"The Lord knows," said Kettle.

"Well, you're a cheerful companion, anyway."

"I wasn't paid for a yacht skippering job and asked to say nice things which weren't true. But if you don't fancy the prospect, go back and try a trade that's less risky. You mayn't like honest work, but it strikes me this kind of contract's out your weight anyway."

The Jew looked as if he would like to let loose his tongue, and perhaps handle a weapon, but his motto was "business first," and he could not afford

to have an open fracas with Kettle then. So he swallowed his resentment, and said, "Get on," and clung dizzily on to his thwart.

As each roller passed under her, the surf-boat swooped higher and higher, and the laboring paddles seemed to give her less and less momentum. The head-man strained at the steering oar. The Krooboys had hard work to keep their perches on the gunwale.

At last the head-man shouted, and the paddles ceased. They were waiting for a smooth. Roller after roller swept under them, and the boat rode them dizzily, but kept her place just beyond the outer edge of the surf. From over his shoulder, the head-man watched the charging seas with animal intentness. Then with a sudden shriek he gave the word, and the paddles stabbed the water into spray. The heavy boat rushed forward again, and a great towering sea rushed after her. It reared her up, stern uppermost, and passed, leaving her half swamped by its foaming passage; and then came another sea, and the boat broached to and spilt. The Krooboys jumped like black frogs from either gunwale, and Kettle jumped also, and made his way easily to the sand, being used to this experience. But Sheriff was pulled on to the beach with difficulty, and the Jew was hauled there in a state verging on the unconscious. He looked at the fearsome surf, and shuddered openly. "How shall we get off again?" he gasped.

"More swimming," said Kettle tersely. "And perhaps not manage it at all. You'd better give up the game, and go off decently to-morrow morning from the Custom House wharf."

But Mr. White, whatever might be the list of his

failings, was certainly possessed of dogged pluck, and as he had got that far with his enterprise, did not intend to desert it. He got rid of the sea-water that was within him, and resolutely led the way to the cable station, which loomed square and solid through the dusk. Sheriff followed, and Captain Kettle, with his hands in his pockets, brought up the rear. The Krooboys, according to their orders, stayed on the beach, brought in the boat, collected her furniture, and got all ready for relaunching.

White seemed to know the way as if he had been there before. He went up to the building, entered through an open door, and strode quietly in his rubber-soled shoes along a dark passage. At the end was a room in partial darkness, and a man who watched a spot of light which darted hither and back, and between whiles wrote upon paper. To him White went up, and clapped a cold revolver muzzle against the nape of his neck.

"Now," he said, "I want the loan of your instrument for about an hour. If you resist, you'll be shot. The noise of the shot will bring out the other men on the station, and they'll be killed also. There are plenty of us here, and we are well armed, and we intend to have our own way. If you are not anything short of a fool, you'll go and sit on that chair, and keep quiet till you're given leave to talk."

"I don't think I'll argue it with you," said the operator coolly. He got up and sat where he was told, and Kettle, according to arrangement, stood guard over him. "I suppose you malefactors know," he added, "that there are certain pains and penalties attached to this sort of amusement, and that you

are bound to get caught quite soon, whether you shoot me or let me go?"

Nobody answered him. White had sat down at the instrument table, and was tapping out messages like a man well accustomed to the work.

"Of course with those black mask things over your faces I couldn't recognize you again, even if I was put in the box; but, my good chaps, your steamer's known, there's no getting over that. Much better clear out before any mischief's done, and own up you've made a mistake."

White turned on the man with a sudden fury. "If you don't keep your silly mouth shut, I'll have you throttled," he threatened, and after that the only noise that broke the silence was the *tap—tap-tap—taptapping* of the telegraph instrument.

Only two men in that darkened room knew what message was being dispatched, and these were White and the dispossessed operator. The one worked with cool, steady industry, and the other listened with strained intentness. Sheriff was outside the door keeping guard on the rest of the house. But Kettle, from his station behind the operator's chair, listened with a strange disquietude. He had been told that the object of the raid was to arrange a stock exchange robbery, and to this he had tacitly agreed. According to his narrow creed (as gathered from the South Shields chapel) none but rogues and thieves dealt in stocks and shares, and if these chose to rob one another, an honest man might well look on non-interferent. But what guarantee had he that this robbery was not planned to draw plunder from the outside public as well? The pledged word of Mr. White. And that was worth? He smiled disdainfully when he thought of the slenderness of its value.

Tap—taptap—tap—tap—taptap, said the tantalizing instrument, going steadily on with its hidden speech.

The stifling heat of the room seemed to get more oppressive. The mystery of the thing beat against Kettle's brain.

Of course he could not read the deposed operator's thoughts, though he could see easily that the man was reading the messages which White was so glibly sending off. But it was clear that the man's agitation was growing; growing, too, out of all proportion to the coolness he had shown when his room was first invaded. At last an exclamation was forced from him, almost, as it seemed, involuntarily. "Oh, you ghastly scoundrel," he murmured, and on that Kettle spoke. He could not stand the mystery any longer.

"Tell me," he said, "exactly what message that man's sending."

"But I forbid you to do any such thing," said White, and reached for his revolver. But before his fingers touched it, he looked up and saw Kettle's weapon covering him.

"You put that down," came the crisp order, and White obeyed it nervously enough.

"And now go and stand in the middle of the room till I give you leave to shift."

White did this also. He grasped the fact that Captain Kettle was not in a mood to be trifled with.

"Now, Mr. Telegraph Clerk, as you understand this tack-hammer language, and as I could see you've been following all the messages that's been sent, just tell me the whole lot of it, please, as near as you can remember."

"He called up London first, and gave what sounded like a registered address, and sent the word 'corruscate.' That's probably code; anyway I don't know what it meant. Then he called the Cape, and sent a message to the Governor. He hadn't got to the end, and there was no signature, but it was evidently intended to make them believe that it was sent from the Colonial Office at home."

"Well," said Kettle, "what was the message?"

"Good Lord, man, he's directing the Governor to declare war on the Transvaal. You know there's been trouble with them lately, and they'll believe that it comes from the right place. If this is some stock-jobbing plant——"

"It is."

"Then, by heavens, it'll be carried through unless you let me stop it at once. The thing's plausible enough——"

But here White recovered from his temporary scare, and cut in with a fine show of authority. "S'help me, Kettle, you're making a pretty mess of things. You make me knock off in the middle of a message, and they'll not know what's up at the other end if I don't go on. Look at that mirror."

"I see the spot of light winking about."

"That's the operator at the next station calling me."

"But is it true what this gentleman's been telling me?"

"I suppose it is, more or less. But what of that? What did you lose your temper for like this? You knew quite well what we came here for."

"I knew you came to steal money from stock-brokers. I knew nothing about going to try and run my country in for a war."

"Poof, that's nothing. The war would not hurt you and me. Besides, it must go on now. I've cabled my partner in London to be a bear in Kaffirs for all he's worth. We must smash all the instruments here so they can't contradict the news, and then be off."

"Your partner can be a bear or any other kind of beast, in any sort of niggers he chooses, but I'm not going to let you run England into war at any price."

"Pah, my good man, what does that matter to you? What's England ever done for you?"

"I live there," said Kettle, "when I'm at home, and as I've lived everywhere else in the world, I'm naturally a bit more fond of the old shop than if I'd never gone away from her beach. No, Mr. White, England's never done anything special for me that I could, so to speak, put my finger on, but—ah would you!"

White, in desperation, had made a grab at the revolver lying on the instrument table, but with a quick rush Kettle possessed himself of it, and Mr. White found himself again looking down the muzzle of Captain Kettle's weapon.

But a moment later the aim was changed. Sheriff, hearing the whispered talk, had come in through the doorway to see what it was about, and promptly found himself favored in his turn.

"Shift your pistol to muzzle end, and bring it here."

Sheriff obeyed the order promptly. He had seen enough of Captain Kettle's usefulness as a marksman not to dispute his wishes.

"Did you know that we came here to stir up a war between our folks at home and the Transvaal?"

"I suppose so."

"And smash up the telegraph instruments afterward, so that it could not be contradicted till it was well under way?"

"That would have been necessary."

"And you remember what you told me on that steamboat? Oh! you liar!" said Kettle, and Sheriff winced.

"I'm so beastly hard up," he said.

Captain Kettle might have commented on his own poverty, but he did not do this. Instead, he said: "Now we'll go back to the ship, and of course you'll have to scuttle her just as if you'd brought off your game here successfully. Run England in for a bloody war, would you, just for some filthy money? By James! no. Come, march. And you, Mr. Telegraph Clerk, get under weigh with that deaf and dumb alphabet of yours, and ring up the Cape, and tell them what's been sent is all a joke. and there's to be no war at all."

"I'll do that, you may lay your heart on it," said the operator. "But Mr. I-don't-know-what-your-name-is, look here. Hadn't you better stay? I'll see things are put all right. But if you go off with those two sharks, it might be dangerous."

"Thank you, kindly, sir," said Kettle; "but I'm a man that's been accustomed to look after myself all the world over, and I'm not likely to get hurt now. Those two may be sharks, as you say, but I'm not altogether a simple little lamb myself."

"I shall be a bit uneasy for you. You're a good soul whoever you may be, and I'd like to do something for you if I could."

"Then, sir," said Kettle, "just keep quiet, here, and get on with your work contradicting that wire, and

don't send for any of those little Portuguese soldiers with guns to see us off. It's a bad beach, and we mayn't get off first try, and if they started to annoy us whilst we were at work, I might have to shoot some of them, which would be a trouble."

"I'll see to that," said the operator. "We'll just shake hands if you don't mind, before you go. There's more man to the cubic inch about you than in any other fellow I've come across for a long time. I've no club at home now, or I'd ask you to look me up. But I dare say we shall meet again some time. So long."

"Good-by, sir," said Kettle, and shook the operator by the hand. Then he turned, and drove the other two raiders before him out of the house, and down to the beach, and, with the Krooboys, applied himself to launching the surf-boat through the breakers.

"Run the old shop into a war, would you?" he soliloquized to two very limp, unconscious figures, as the Krooboys got the surf-boat afloat after the third upset. "It's queer what some men will do for money." And then, a minute later, he muttered to himself: "By James! look at that dawn coming up behind the island there; yellow as a lemon. Now, that is fine. I can make a bit of poetry out of that."

CHAPTER VII

THE DERELICT

"Her cargo'll have shifted," said the third mate, "and when she got that list her people will have felt frightened and left her."

"She's a scary look to her, with her yard-arms spiking every other sea," said Captain Image, "and her decks like the side of a house. I shouldn't care to navigate a craft that preferred to lie down on her beam ends myself."

"Take this glass, sir, and you'll see the lee quarter-boat davit-tackles are overhauled. That means they got at least one boat in the water. To my mind she's derelict."

"Yard-arm tackles rigged and over-hauled, too," said Captain Image. "She'll have carried a big boat on the top of that house amidships, and that's gone, too. Well, I hope her crew have got to dry land somewhere, or been picked up, poor beggars. Nasty things, those old wind-jammers, Mr. Strake. Give me steam."

"But there's a pile of money in her still," said the third mate, following up his own thoughts. "She's an iron ship, and she'll be two thousand tons, good. Likely enough in the 'Frisco grain trade. Seems to me a new ship, too; anyway, she's got those humbugging patent tops'ls."

"And you're thinking she'd be a nice plum if we could pluck her in anywhere?" said Image, reading what was in his mind.

"Well, me lad, I know that as well as you, and no one would be pleaseder to pocket £300. But the old *M'poso's* a mailboat, and because she's got about a quarter of a hundredweight of badly spelt letters on board, she can't do that sort of salvage work if there's no life-saving thrown in as an extra reason. Besides, we're behind time as it is, with smelling round for so much cargo, and though I shall draw my two and a-half per cent. on that, I shall have it all to pay away again, and more to boot, in fines for being late. No, I tell you it isn't all sheer profit and delight in being skipper on one of those West African coast boats. And there's another thing: the Chief was telling me only this morning that they've figured it very close on the coal. We only have what'll take us to Liverpool ourselves, without trying to pull a yawing, heavy, towing thing like that on behind us."

Strake drummed at the white rail of the bridge. He was a very young man, and he was very keen on getting the chance of distinguishing himself; and here, on the warm, windless swells abeam, the chance seemed to sit beckoning him. "I've been thinking, sir, if you can lend me half a dozen men, I could take her in somewhere myself."

"I'm as likely to lend you half a dozen angels. Look at the deck hands; look at the sickly trip this has been. We've had to put some of them on double tricks at the wheel already, and as for getting any painting done, or having the ship cleaned up a bit, why, I can see we shall go into Liverpool as dirty as a Geordie collier. Besides, Mr. Strake, I believe I've told you once or twice already that you're not much use yourself, but anyway you're the best that's left, and I'm having to stand watch

and watch with you as it is. If the mate gets out of his bed between here and home, it'll be to go over the side, and the second mate's nearly as bad with that nasty blackwater fever only just off him; and there you are. Mr. Strake, if you have a penn'oth of brains stowed away anywhere, I wish to whiskers you'd show 'em sometimes."

"Old man's mad at losing a nice lump of salvage," thought Strake. "Natural, I guess." So he said quietly: "Ay, ay, sir," and walked away to the other end of the bridge.

Captain Image followed him half-way, but stopped irresolutely with his hand on the engine-room telegraph. On the fore main deck below him his old friend, Captain Owen Kettle, was leaning on the rail, staring wistfully at the derelict.

"Poor beggar," Image mused, "'tisn't hard to guess what he's thinking about. I wonder if I could fix it for him to take her home. It might set him on his legs again, and he's come low enough, Lord knows. If I hadn't given him a room in the first-class for old times' sake, he'd have had to go home, after his trouble on the West Coast, as a distressed seaman, and touch his cap to me when I passed. I've not done badly by him, but I shall have to pay for that room in the first-class out of my own pocket, and if he was to take that old wind-jammer in somewhere, he'd fork out, and very like give me a dash besides.

"Yes, I will say that about Kettle; he's honest as a barkeeper, and generous besides. He's a steamer sailor, of course, and has been most of these years, and how he'll do the white wings business again, Lord only knows. Forget he hasn't got engines till it's too late, and then drown himself probably.

However, that's his palaver. Where we're going to scratch him up a crew from's the thing that bothers me. Well, we'll see." He leaned down over the bridge rail, and called.

Kettle looked up.

"Here a minute, Captain."

Poor Kettle's eye lit, and he came up the ladders with a boy's quickness.

Image nodded toward the deserted vessel. "Fine full-rigger, hasn't she been? What do you make her out for?"

"'Frisco grain ship. Stuff in bulk. And it's shifted."

"Looks that way. Have you forgotten all your 'mainsail haul' and the square-rig gymnastics?"

"I'm hard enough pushed now to remember even the theory-sums they taught at navigation school if I thought they would serve me."

"I know. And I'm as sorry for you, Captain, as I can hold. But you see, it's this: I'm short of sailormen; I've barely enough to steer and keep the decks clean; anyway I've none to spare."

"I don't ask for fancy goods," said Kettle eagerly. "Give me anything with hands on it—apes, niggers, stokers, what you like, and I'll soon teach them their dancing steps."

Captain Image pulled at his moustache. "The trouble of it is, we are short everywhere. It's been a sickly voyage, this. I couldn't let you have more than two out of the stokehold, and even if we take those, the old Chief will be fit to eat me. You could do nothing with that big vessel with only two beside yourself."

"Let me go round and see. I believe I can rake up enough hands somehow."

"Well, you must be quick about it," said Image. "I've wasted more than enough time already. I can only give you five minutes, Captain. Oh, by the way, there's a nigger stowaway from Sarry Leone you can take if you like. He's a stonemason or some such foolishness, and I don't mind having him drowned. If you hammer him enough, probably he'll learn how to put some weight on a brace."

"That stonemason's just the man I can use," said Kettle. "Get him for me. I'll never forget your kindness over this, Captain, and you may depend upon me to do the square thing by you if I get her home."

Captain Kettle ran off down the bridge and was quickly out of sight, and hard at his quest for volunteers. Captain Image waited a minute, and he turned to his third mate. "Now, me lad," he said, "I know you're disappointed; but with the other mates sick like they are, it's just impossible for me to let you go. If I did, the Company would sack me, and the dirty Board of Trade would probably take away my ticket. So you may as well do the kind, and help poor old Cappie Kettle. You see what he's come down to, through no fault of his own. You're young, and you're full to the coamings with confidence. I'm older, and I know that luck may very well get up and hit me, and I'll be wanting a helping hand myself. It's a rotten, undependable trade, this sailoring. You might just call the carpenter, and get the cover off that smaller lifeboat."

"You think he'll get a crew, then, sir, and not our deckhands?"

"Him? He'll get some things with legs and arms to them, if he has to whittle 'em out of kindling-wood.

It's not that that'll stop Cappie Kettle now, me lad."

The third mate went off, sent for the carpenter, and started to get a lifeboat cleared and ready for launching. Captain Image fell to anxiously pacing the upper bridge, and presently Kettle came back to him.

"Well, Captain," he said, "I got a fine crew to volunteer, if you can see your way to let me have them. There's a fireman and a trimmer, both English; there's a third-class passenger—a Dago of some sort, I think he is, that was a ganger on the Congo railway—and there's Mr. Dayton-Philipps; and if you send me along your nigger stonemason, that'll make a good, strong ship's company."

"Dayton-Philipps!" said Image. "Why, he's an officer in the English Army, and he's been in command of Haussa troops on the Gold Coast, and he's been some sort of a Resident, or political thing up in one of those nigger towns at the back there. What's he want to go for?"

"Said he'd come for the fun of the thing."

Captain Image gave a grim laugh. "Well, I think he'll find all the fun he's any use for before he's ashore again. Extraordinary thing some people can't see they're well off when they've got a job ashore. Now, Mr. Strake, hurry with that boat and get her lowered away. You're to take charge and bring her back; and mind, you're not to leave the captain here and his gang aboard if the vessel's too badly wrecked to be safe."

He turned to Kettle. "Excuse my giving that last order, old man, but I know how keen you are, and I'm not going to let you go off to try and navigate a sieve. You're far too good a man to be drowned uselessly."

The word was "Hurry," now that the final decision had been given, and the davit tackles squeaked out as the lifeboat jerked down toward the water. She rode there at the end of her painter, and the three rowers and the third mate fended her off, while Kettle's crew of nondescripts scrambled unhandily down to take their places. The negro stowaway refused stubbornly to leave the steamer, and so was lowered ignominiously in a bowline, and then, as he still objected loudly that he came from Sa' Leone, and was a free British subject, some one crammed a bucket over his head, amidst the uproarious laughter of the onlookers.

Captain Kettle swung himself down the swaying Jacob's ladder, and the boat's painter was cast off; and under three oars she moved slowly off over the hot sun-kissed swells. Advice and farewells boomed like a thunderstorm from the steamer, and an animated frieze of faces and figures and waving headgear decorated her rail.

Ahead of them, the quiet ship shouldered clumsily over the rollers, now gushing down till she dipped her martingale, now swooping up again, sending whole cataracts of water swirling along her waist.

The men in the boat regarded her with curious eyes as they drew nearer. Even the three rowers turned their heads, and were called to order therefor by the mate at the tiller. A red ensign was seized jack downward in her main rigging, the highest note of the sailorman's agony of distress. On its wooden case, in her starboard fore-rigging, a dioptric lens sent out the faint green glow of a lamp's light into the sunshine.

The third mate drew attention to this last "Lot of oil in that lamp," he said, "or it means they

haven't deserted her very long. To my mind, it must have been in yesterday's breeze her cargo shifted, and scared her people into leaving her."

"We shall see," said Kettle, still staring intently ahead.

The boat was run up cannily alongside, and Kettle jumped into the main chains and clambered on board over the bulwarks. "Now, pass up my crew, Mr. Strake," said he.

"I'm coming myself next, if you don't mind," said the third mate, and did so. "Must obey the old man's orders," he explained, as they stood together on the sloping decks. "You heard yourself what he said, Captain."

"Well, Mr. Mate," said Kettle grimly, "I hope you'll decide she's seaworthy, because, whatever view you take of it, as I've got this far, here I'm going to stay."

The mate frowned. He was a young man; he was here in authority, and he had a great notion of making his authority felt. Captain Kettle was to him merely a down-on-his-luck free-passage nobody, and as the mate was large and lusty he did not anticipate trouble. So he remarked rather crabbedly that he was going to obey his orders, and went aft along the slanting deck.

It was clear that the vessel had been swept—badly swept. Ropes-ends streamed here and there and overboard in every direction, and everything movable had been carried away eternally by the sea. A goodly part of the starboard bulwarks had vanished, and the swells gushed in and out as they chose. But the hatch tarpaulins and companions were still in place; and though it was clear from the list (which was so great that they could not walk

without holding on) that her cargo was badly shifted, there was no evidence so far that she was otherwise than sound.

The third mate led the way on to the poop, opened the companion doors and slide, and went below. Kettle followed. There was a cabin with state rooms off it, littered, but dry. Strake went down on his knees beneath the table, searching for something. "Lazaret hatch ought to be down here," he explained. "I want to see in there. Ah, it is."

He got his fingers in the ring and pulled it back. Then he whistled. "Half-full of water," he said. "I thought so from the way she floated. It's up to the beams down here. Likely enough she'll have started a plate somewhere. 'Fraid it's no go for you, Captain. Why, if a breeze was to come on, half the side of her might drop out, and she'd go down like a stone."

Now to Kettle's honor be it said (seeing what he had in his mind) he did not tackle the man as he knelt there peering into the lazaret. Instead he waited till he stood up again, and then made his statement coldly and deliberately.

"This ship's not too dangerous for me, and I choose to judge. And if she'll do for me, she's good enough for the crew I've got in your boat. Now I want them on deck, and at work without any more palaver."

"Do you, by God!" said the mate, and then the pair of them closed without any further preliminaries. They were both of them well used to quick rough-and-tumbles, and they both of them knew that the man who gets the first grip in these wrestles usually wins, and instinctively each tried to act on that knowledge.

But if the third mate had bulk and strength, Kettle had science and abundant wiriness; and though the pair of them lost their footing on the sloping cabin floor at the first embrace, and wriggled over and under like a pair of eels, Captain Kettle got a thumb artistically fixed in the bigger man's windpipe, and held it there doggedly. The mate, growing more and more purple, hit out with savage force, but Kettle dodged the bull-like blows like the boxer he was, and the mate's efforts gradually relaxed.

But at this point they were interrupted. "That wobbly boat was making me sea-sick," said a voice, "so I came on board here. Hullo, you fellows!"

Kettle looked up. "Mr. Philipps," he said, "I wish you'd go and get the rest of our crew on deck out of the boat."

"But what are you two doing down there?"

"We disagreed over a question of judgment. He said this ship isn't safe, and I shouldn't have the chance to take her home. I say there's nothing wrong with her that can't be remedied, and home I'm going to take her, anyway. It might be the one chance in my life, sir, of getting a balance at the bank, and I'm not going to miss it."

"Ho!" said Dayton-Philipps.

"If you don't like to come, you needn't," said Kettle. "But I'm going to have the stonemason and the Dago, and those two coal-heavers. Perhaps you'd better go back. It will be wet, hard work here; no way the sort of job to suit a soldier."

Dayton-Philipps flushed slightly, and then he laughed. "I suppose that's intended to be nasty," he said. "Well, Captain, I shall have to prove to you that we soldiers are equal to a bit of manual

labor sometimes. By the way, I don't want to interfere in a personal matter, but I'd take it as a favor if you wouldn't kill Strake quite. I rather like him."

"Anything to oblige," said Kettle, and took his thumb out of the third mate's windpipe. "And now, sir, as you've so to speak signed on for duty here, away with you on deck and get those four other beauties up out of the boat."

Dayton-Philipps touched his hat and grinned. "Ay, ay, sir," he said, and went back up the companion.

Shortly afterward he came to report the men on board, and Kettle addressed his late opponent. "Now, look here, young man, I don't want to have more trouble on deck before the hands. Have you had enough?"

"For the present, yes," said the third mate huskily. "But I hope we'll meet again some other day to have a bit of further talk."

"I am sure I shall be quite ready. No man ever accused me of refusing a scrap. But, me lad, just take one tip from me: don't you go and make Captain Image anxious by saying this ship isn't seaworthy, or he'll begin to ask questions, and he may get you to tell more than you're proud about."

"You can go and get drowned your own way. As far as I am concerned, no one will guess it's coming off till they see it in the papers."

"Thanks," said Kettle. "I knew you'd be nice about it."

The third mate went down to his boat, and the three rowers took her across to the *M'poso*, where she was hauled up to davits again. The steamer's siren boomed out farewells, as she got under way

again, and Kettle with his own hands unbent the reversed ensign from the ship's main rigging, and ran it up to the peak and dipped it three times in salute.

He breathed more freely now. One chance and a host of unknown dangers lay ahead of him. But the dangers he disregarded. Dangers were nothing new to him. It was the chance which lured him on. Chances so seldom came in his way, that he intended to make this one into a certainty if the efforts of desperation could do it.

Alone of all the six men on the derelict, Captain Kettle had knowledge of the seaman's craft; but, for the present, thews and not seamanship were required. The vessel lay in pathetic helplessness on her side, liable to capsize in the first squall which came along, and their first effort must be to get her in proper trim whilst the calm continued. They knocked out the wedges with their heels, and got the tarpaulins off the main hatch; they pulled away the hatch covers, and saw beneath them smooth slopes of yellow grain.

As though they were an invitation to work, shovels were made fast along the coamings of the hatch. The six men took these, and with shouts dropped down upon the grain. And then began a period of Homeric toil. The fireman and the coal-trimmer set the pace, and with a fine contempt for the unhandiness of amateurs did not fail to give a display of their utmost. Kettle and Dayton-Philipps gamely kept level with them. The Italian ganger turned out to have his pride also, and did not lag, and only the free-born British subject from Sierra Leone endeavored to shirk his due proportion of the toil.

But high-minded theories as to the rights of man

were regarded here as little as threats to lay information before a justice of the peace; and under the sledge-hammer arguments of shovel blows from whoever happened to be next to him, the unfortunate colored gentleman descended to the grade of nigger again (which he had repeatedly sworn never to do), and toiled and sweated equally with his betters.

The heat under the decks was stifling, and dust rose from the wheat in choking volumes, but the pace of the circling shovels was never allowed to slacken. They worked there stripped to trousers, and they understood, one and all, that they were working for their lives. A breeze had sprung up almost as soon as the *M'poso* had steamed away, and hourly it was freshening: the barometer in the cabin was registering a steady fall; the sky was banking up with heavy clouds.

Kettle had handled sheets and braces and hove the vessel to so as to steady her as they worked, but she still labored heavily in the sea, and beneath them they could hear the leaden swish of water in the floor of the hold beneath. Their labor was having its effect, and by infinitesimal gradations they were counteracting the list and getting the ship upright; but the wind was worsening, and it seemed to them also that the water was getting deeper under their feet, and that the vessel rode more sluggishly.

So far the well had not been sounded. It is no use getting alarming statistics to discourage one's self unnecessarily. But after night had fallen, and it was impossible to see to work in the gloomy hold any longer without lamps, Captain Kettle took the sounding-rod and found eight feet.

He mentioned this when he took down the lanterns into the hold, but he did not think it necessary to add that as the sounding had been taken with the well on the slant it was therefore considerably under the truth. Still he sent Dayton-Philipps and the trimmer on deck to take a spell at the pumps, and himself resumed his shovel work alongside the others.

Straight away on through the night the six men stuck to their savage toil, the blood from their blistered hands reddening the shafts of the shovels. Every now and again one or another of them, choked with the dust, went to get a draft of lukewarm water from the scuttlebutt. But no one stayed over long on these excursions. The breeze had blown up into a gale. The night overhead was starless and moonless, but every minute the black heaven was split by spurts of lightning, which showed the laboring, dishevelled ship set among great mountains of breaking seas.

The sight would have been bad from a well-manned, powerful steamboat; from the deck of the derelict it approached the terrific. With the seas constantly crashing on board of her, to have left the hatches open would have been, in her semi-waterlogged condition, to court swamping, and after midnight these were battened down, and the men with the shovels worked among the frightened, squeaking rats in the closed-in box of the hold. There were four on board the ship during that terrible night who openly owned to being cowed, and freely bewailed their insanity in ever being lured away from the *M'poso*. Dayton-Philipps had sufficient self-control to keep his feelings, whatever they were, unstated; but Kettle faced all difficulties with indomitable courage and a smiling face.

"I believe," said Dayton-Philipps to him once when they were taking a spell together at the clanking pumps, "you really glory in finding yourself in this beastly mess."

"I have got to earn out the salvage of this ship somehow," Kettle shouted back to him through the windy darkness, "and I don't much care what work comes between now and when I handle the check."

"You've got a fine confidence. I'm not grumbling, mind, but it seems very unlikely we shall be still afloat to-morrow morning."

"We shall pull through, I tell you."

"Well," said Dayton-Philipps, "I suppose you are a man that's always met with success. I'm not. I've got blundering bad luck all along, and if there's a hole available, I get into it."

Captain Kettle laughed aloud into the storm. "Me!" he cried. "Me in luck! There's not been a man more bashed and kicked by luck between here and twenty years back. I suppose God thought it good for me, and He's kept me down to my bearings in bad luck ever since I first got my captain's ticket. But He's not cruel, Mr. Philipps, and He doesn't push a man beyond the end of his patience. My time's come at last. He's given me something to make up for all the weary waiting. He's sent me this derelict, and He only expects me to do my human best, and then He'll let me get her safely home."

"Good Heavens, Skipper, what are you talking about? Have you seen visions or something?"

"I'm a man, Mr. Philipps, that's always said my prayers regular all through life. I've asked for things, big things, many of them, and I'll not deny they've been mostly denied me. I seemed to know

they'd be denied. But in the last week or so there's been a change. I've asked on, just as earnestly as I knew how, and I seemed to hear Him answer. It was hardly a voice, and yet it was like a voice; it appeared to come out of millions of miles of distance; and I heard it say: 'Captain, I do not forget the sparrows, and I have not forgotten you. I have tried you long enough. Presently you shall meet with your reward.' "

Dayton-Philipps stared. Was the man going mad?

"And that's what it is, sir, that makes me sure I shall bring this vessel into some port safely and pocket the salvage."

"Look here, Skipper," said Dayton-Philipps, "you are just fagged to death, and I'm the same. We've been working till our hands are raw as butcher's meat, and we're clean tired out, and we must go below and get a bit of sleep. If the ship swims, so much the better; if she sinks, we can't help it; anyway, we're both of us too beat to work any more. I shall be 'seeing things' myself next."

"Mr. Philipps," said the little sailor gravely, "I know you don't mean anything wrong, so I take no offence. But I'm a man convinced; I've heard the message I told you with my own understanding; and it isn't likely anything you can say will persuade me out of it. I can see you are tired out, as you say, so go you below and get a spell of sleep. But as for me, I've got another twenty hours' wakefulness in me yet, if needs be. This chance has mercifully been sent in my way, as I've said, but naturally it's expected of me that I do my human utmost as well to see it through."

"If you stay on at this heart-breaking work, so do I," said Dayton-Philipps, and toiled gamely on

at the pump. There he was still when day broke, sawing up and down like an automaton. But before the sun rose, utter weariness had done its work. His bleeding fingers loosed themselves from the break, his knees failed beneath him, and he fell in an unconscious stupor of sleep on to the wet planking of the deck. For half an hour more Kettle struggled on at the pump, doing double work; but even his flesh and blood had its breaking strain; and at last he could work no more.

He leaned dizzily up against the pump for a minute or so, and then with an effort he pulled his still unconscious companion away and laid him on the dry floor of a deck-house. There was a pannikin of cold stewed tea slung from a hook in there, and half a sea biscuit on one of the bunks. He ate and drank greedily, and then went out again along the streaming decks to work, so far as his single pair of hands could accomplish such a thing, at getting the huge derelict once more in sailing trim.

The shovels meanwhile had been doing their work, and although the list was not entirely gone, the vessel at times (when a sea buttressed her up) floated almost upright. The gale was still blowing, but it had veered to the southward, and on the afternoon of that day Kettle called all hands on deck and got her under way again, and found to his joy that the coal-trimmer had some elementary notion of taking a wheel.

"I rate you as Mate," he said in his gratitude, "and you'll draw salvage pay according to your rank. I was going to make Mr. Philipps my officer, but——"

"Don't apologize," said Dayton-Philipps. "I don't know the name of one string from another, and I'm

quite conscious of my deficiency. But just watch me put in another spell at those infernal pumps."

The list was of less account now, and the vessel was once more under command of her canvas. It was the leak which gave them most cause for anxiety. Likely enough it was caused by the mere wrenching away of a couple of rivets. But the steady inpour of water through the holes would soon have made the ship grow unmanageable and founder if it was not constantly attended to. Where the leak was they had not a notion. Probably it was deep down under the cargo of grain, and quite unget-at-able; but anyway it demanded a constant service at the pumps to keep it in check, and this the bone-weary crew were but feebly competent to give. They were running up into the latitude of the Bay, too, and might reasonably expect that "Biscay weather" would not take much from the violence of the existing gale.

However, the dreaded Bay, fickle as usual, saw fit to receive them at first with a smiling face. The gale eased to a plain smiling wind; the sullen black clouds dissolved away into fleckless blue, and a sun came out which peeled their arms and faces as they worked. During the afternoon they rose the brown sails of a Portuguese fishing schooner, and Kettle headed toward her.

Let his crew be as willing as they would, there was no doubt that this murderous work at the pumps could not be kept up for a voyage to England. If he could not get further reinforcements, he would have to take the ship into the nearest foreign port to barely save her from sinking. And then where would be his sighed-for salvage? Woefully thinned, he thought, or more probably whisked

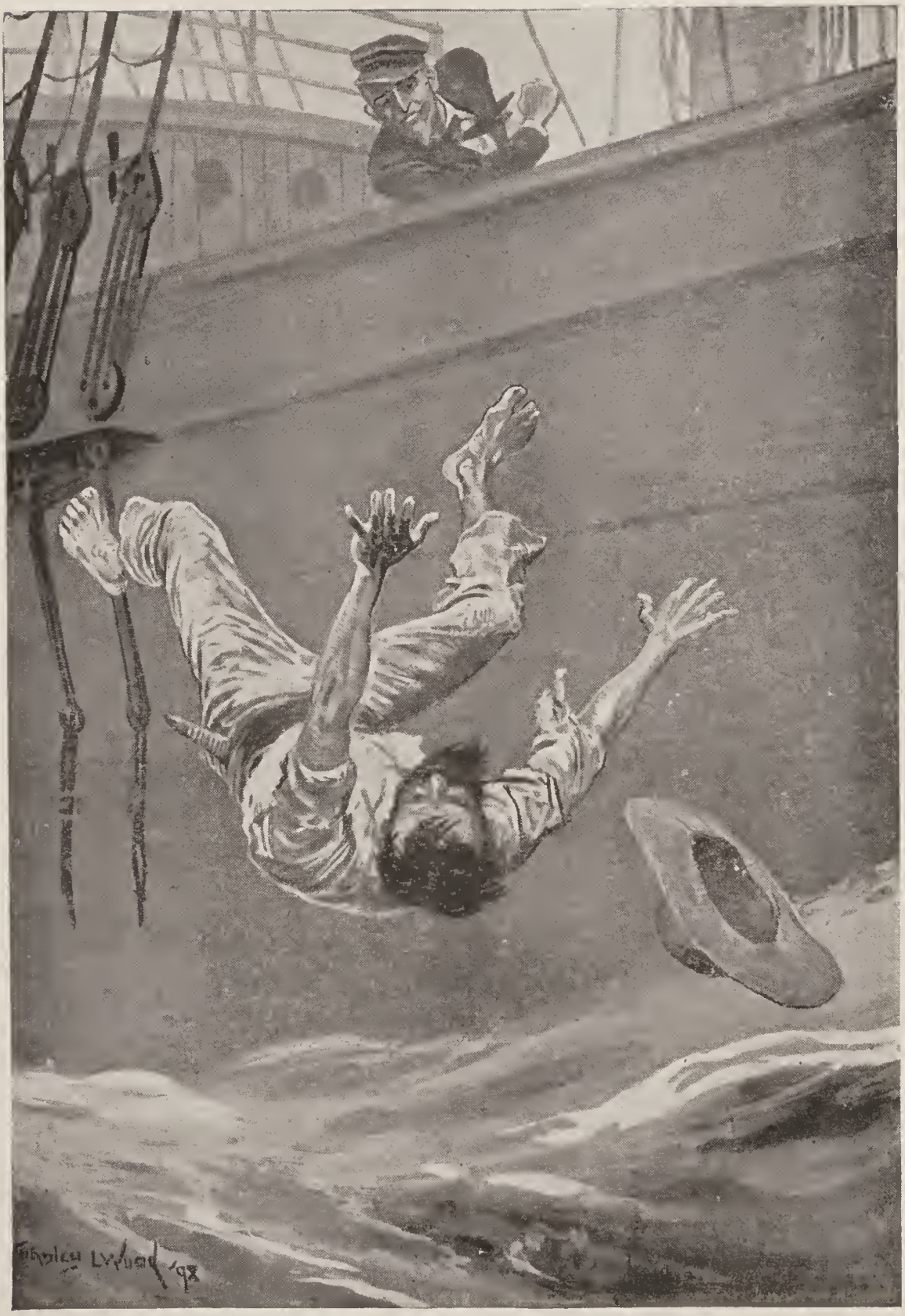
away altogether. Captain Kettle had a vast distrust for the shore foreigner over questions of law proceedings and money matters. So he made for the schooner, hove his own vessel to, and signalled that he wished to speak.

A boat was slopped into the water from the schooner's deck, and ten swarthy, ragged Portuguese fishermen crammed into her. A couple pushed at the oars, and they made their way perilously over the deep hill and dale of ocean with that easy familiarity which none but deep-sea fishermen can attain. They worked up alongside, caught a rope which was thrown them, and nimbly climbed over on to the decks.

Two or three of them had a working knowledge of English; their captain spoke it with fluent inaccuracy; and before any of them had gone aft to Kettle, who stood at the wheel, they heard the whole story of the ship being found derelict, and (very naturally) were anxious enough by some means or another to finger a share of the salvage. Even a ragged Portuguese *baccalhao* maker can have his ambitions for prosperity like other people.

Their leader made his proposal at once. "All right-a, Captain, I see how you want. We take charge now, and take-a you into Ferrol without you being at more trouble."

"Nothing of the kind," said Kettle. "I'm just wanting the loan of two or three hands to give my fellows a spell or two at that pump. We're a bit short-handed, that's all. But otherwise we're quite comfortable. I'll pay A. B.'s wages on Liverpool scale, and that's a lot more than you Dagos give amongst yourselves, and if the men work well I'll throw in a dash besides for 'bacca money.' "



HE PICKED UP THE MAN AND SENT HIM AFTER THE KNIFE.

[*Page* 175.

"Ta-ta-ta," said the Portuguese, with a wave of his yellow fist. "It cannot be done, and I will not lend you men. It shall do as I say; we take-a you into Ferroll. Do not fear-a, captain; you shall have money for finding sheep; you shall have some of our salvage."

Dayton-Philipps, who was standing near, and knew the little sailor's views, looked for an outbreak. But Kettle held himself in, and still spoke to the man civilly.

"That's good English you talk," he said. "Do all your crowd understand the language?"

"No," said the fellow, readily enough, "that man does not, nor does him, nor him."

"Right—oh!" said Kettle. "Then, as those three man can't kick up a bobbery at the other end, they've just got to stay here and help work this vessel home. And as for the rest of you filthy, stinking, scale-covered cousins of apes, over the side you go before you're put. Thought you were going to steal my lawful salvage, did you, you crawling, yellow-faced—ah!"

The hot-tempered Portuguese was not a man to stand this tirade (as Kettle anticipated) unmoved. His fingers made a vengeful snatch toward the knife in his belt, but Kettle was ready for this, and caught it first and flung it overboard. Then with a clever heave he picked up the man and sent him after the knife.

He tripped up one of the Portuguese who couldn't speak English, dragged him to the cabin companion, and toppled him down the ladder. Dayton-Philipps (surprised at himself for abetting such lawlessness) captured a second in like fashion, and the English fireman and coal-trimmer picked up the third and

dropped him down an open hatchway on to the grain in the hold beneath.

But there were six of the fishermen left upon the deck, and these did not look upon the proceedings unmoved. They had been slow to act at first, but when the initial surprise was over, they were blazing with rage and eager to do murder. The Italian and the Sierra Leone nigger ran out of their way on to the forecastle head, and they came on, vainglorious in numbers, and armed with their deadly knives. But the two English roughs, the English gentleman, and the little English sailor, were all of them men well accustomed to take care of their own skins; the belaying pins out of the pinrail seemed to come by instinct into their hands, and not one of them got so much as a scratch.

It was all the affair of a minute. It does not do to let these little impromptu scrimmages simmer over long. In fact, the whole affair was decided in the first rush. The quartette of English went in, despising the "Dagos," and quite intending to clear them off the ship. The invaders were driven overboard by sheer weight of blows and prestige, and the victors leaned on the bulwark puffing and gasping, and watched them swim away to their boat through the clear water below.

"Ruddy Dagos," said the roughs.

"Set of blooming pirates," said Kettle.

But Dayton-Philipps seemed to view the situation from a different point. "I'm rather thinking we are the pirates. How about those three we've got on board? This sort of press-gang work isn't quite approved of nowadays, is it, Skipper?"

"They no speakee English," said Kettle drily. "You might have heard me ask that, sir, before I

started to talk to that skipper to make him begin the show. And he did begin it, and that's the great point. If ever you've been in a police court, you'll always find the magistrate ask, 'Who began this trouble?' And when he finds out, that's the man he logs. No, those fishermen won't kick up a bobbery when they get back to happy Portugal again; and as for our own crowd here on board, they ain't likely to talk when they get ashore, and have money due to them."

"Well, I suppose there's reason in that, though I should have my doubts about the stonemason. He comes from Sierra Leone, remember, and they're great on the rights of man there."

"Quite so," said Kettle. "I'll see the stonemason gets packed off to sea again in a stokehold before he has a chance of stirring up the mud ashore. When the black man gets too pampered, he has to be brought low again with a rush, just to make him understand his place."

"I see," said Dayton-Phillips, and then he laughed.

"There's something that tickles you, sir?"

"I was thinking, Skipper, that for a man who believes he's being put in the way of a soft thing by direct guidance from on high, you're using up a tremendous lot of energy to make sure the Almighty's wishes don't miscarry. But still I don't understand much about these matters myself. And at present it occurs to me that I ought to be doing a spell at those infernal pumps, instead of chattering here."

The three captive Portuguese were brought up on deck and were quickly induced by the ordinary persuasive methods of the merchant service officer to forego their sulkiness and turn-to diligently at what work was required of them. But even with

this help the heavy ship was still considerably undermanned, and the incessant labor at the pumps fell wearily on all hands. The Bay, true to its fickle nature, changed on them again. The sunshine was swamped by a driving gray mist of rain; the glass started on a steady fall; and before dark, Kettle snugged her down to single topsails, himself laying out on the foot-ropes with the Portuguese, as no others of his crew could manage to scramble aloft with so heavy a sea running.

The night worsened as it went on; the wind piled up steadily in violence; and the sea rose till the sodden vessel rode it with a very babel of shrieks, and groans, and complaining sounds. Toward morning, a terrific squall powdered up against them and hove her down, and a dull rumbling was heard in her bowels to let them know that once more her cargo had shifted.

For the moment, even Kettle thought that this time she was gone for good. She lost her way, and lay down like a log in the water, and the racing seas roared over her as though she had been a half-tide rock. By a miracle no one was washed overboard. But her people hung here and there to eyebolts and ropes, mere nerveless wisps of humanity, incapable under those teeming cataracts of waves to lift so much as a finger to help themselves.

Then to the impact of a heavier gasp of the squall, the topgallant masts went, and the small loss of of top-weight seemed momentarily to ease her. Kettle seized upon the moment, He left the trimmer and one of the Portuguese at the wheel, and handed himself along the streaming decks and kicked and cuffed the rest of his crew into activity. He gave

his orders, and the ship wore slowly round before the wind, and began to pay away on the other tack.

Great hills of sea deluged her in the process, and her people worked like mermen, half of their time submerged. But by degrees, as the vast rollers hit and shook her with their ponderous impact, she came upright again, and after a little while shook the grain level in her holds, and assumed her normal angle of heel.

Dayton-Philipps struggled up and hit Kettle on the shoulder. "How's that, umpire?" he bawled. "My faith, you are a clever sailor."

Captain Kettle touched his hat. "God bore a hand there, sir," he shouted through the wind. "If I'd tried to straighten her up like that without outside help, every man here would have been fish-chop this minute."

Even Dayton-Philipps, sceptical though he might be, began to think there was "something in it" as the voyage went on. To begin with, the leak stopped. They did not know how it had happened, and they did not very much care. Kettle had his theories. Anyway it stopped. To go on with, although they were buffeted with every kind of evil weather, all their mischances were speedily rectified. In a heavy sea, all their unstable cargo surged about as though it had been liquid, but it always shifted back again before she quite capsized. The mizzen-mast went bodily overboard in one black rain-squall because they were too short-handed to get sail off it in time, but they found that the vessel sailed almost as well as a brig, and was much easier for a weak crew to manage.

All hands got covered with salt-water boils. All

hands, with the exception of Kettle—who remained, as usual, neat—grew gaunt, bearded, dirty, and unkempt. They were grimed with sea-salt, they were flayed with violent suns; but by dint of hard schooling they were becoming handy sailormen, all of them, and even the negro stonemason learned to obey an order without first thinking over its justice till he earned a premonitory hiding.

In the throat of the English Channel a blundering steamship did her best to run them down, and actually rasped sides with the sailing-vessel as she tore past into the night; but nobody made an attempt to jump for safety on to her decks, nobody even took the trouble to swear at her with any thing like heartfelt profanity.

"It's a blooming Flying Dutchman we're on," said the coal-trimmer who acted as mate. "There's no killing the old beast. Only hope she gets us ashore somehow, and doesn't stay fooling about at sea forever just to get into risks. I want to get off her. She's too blooming lucky to be quite wholesome somehow."

Kettle had intended to make a Channel port, but a gale hustled him north round Land's End, "and you see," he said to Dayton-Philipps, "what I get for not being sufficiently trustful. The old girl's papers are made out to Cardiff, and here we are pushed round into the Bristol Channel. By James! look, there's a tug making up to us. Thing like that makes you feel homey, doesn't it, sir?"

The little spattering tug wheeled up within hail, tossing like a cork on the brown waves of the estuary, and the skipper in the green pulpit between the paddle-boxes waved a hand cheerily.

"Seem to have found some dirty weather, Cap-

tain," he bawled. "Want a pull into Cardiff or Newport?"

"Cardiff. What price?"

"Say £100."

"I wasn't asking to buy the tug. You're putting a pretty fancy figure on her for that new lick of paint you've got on your rails."

"I'll take £80."

"Oh, I can sail her in myself if you're going to be funny. She's as handy as a pilot-boat, brig rigged like this, and my crew know her fine. I'll give you £20 into Cardiff, and you're to dock me for that."

"Twenty wicked people. Now look here, Captain, you don't look very prosperous with that vessel of yours, and will probably have the sack from owners for mishandling her when you get ashore, and I don't want to embitter your remaining years in the workus, so I'll pull you in for fifty quid."

"£20, old bottle nose."

"Come now, Captain, thirty. I'm not here for sport. I've got to make my living."

"My man," said Kettle, "I'll meet you and make it £25, and I'll see you in Aden before I give a penny more. You can take that, or sheer off."

"Throw us your blooming rope," said the tug skipper.

"There, sir," said Kettle *sotto voce* to Dayton-Philipps, "you see the marvellousness of it? God has stood by me to the very end. I've saved at least £10 over that towage, and, by James! I've seen times when a ship mauled about like this would have been bled for four times the amount before a tug would pluck her in."

"Then we are out of the wood now?"

"We'll get the canvas off her, and then you can go below and shave. You can sleep in a shore bed this night, if you choose, sir, and to-morrow we'll see about fingering the salvage. There'll be no trouble there now; we shall just have to ask for a check and Lloyds will pay it, and then you and the hands will take your share, and I—by James! Mr. Philipps, I shall be a rich man over this business. I shouldn't be a bit surprised but what I finger a snug £500 as my share. Oh, sir, Heaven's been very good to me over this, and I know it, and I'm grateful. My wife will be grateful too. I wish you could come to our chapel some day and see her."

"You deserve your luck, Captain, if ever a man did in this world, and, by Jove! we'll celebrate it. We've been living on pig's food for long enough. We'll find the best hotel in Cardiff, and we'll get the best dinner the *chef* there can produce. I want you to be my guest at that."

"I must ask you to excuse me," said Kettle. "I've received a good deal just lately, and I'm thankful, and I want to say so. If you don't mind, I'd rather say it alone."

'I understand, Skipper. You're a heap better man than I am, and if you don't mind, I'd like to shake hands with you. Thanks. We may not meet again, but I shall never forget you and what we've seen on this murderous old wreck of a ship. Hullo, there's Cardiff not twenty minutes ahead. Well, I must go below and clean up after you've docked her."

CHAPTER VIII

TO CAPTURE AN HEIRESS

The *Parakeet* had discharged the last of her coal into the lighters alongside, had cast off from the mooring buoys, and was steaming out of the baking heat of Suez harbor on her way down toward the worse heat of the Red Sea beyond. The clatter and dirt of the working ships, with the smells of hot iron and black humanity, were dying out astern, and presently she slowed up to drop the pilot into his boat, and then stood on again along her course.

A passenger, a young man of eight or nine-and-twenty, lounged on a camp-stool under the upper bridge awning, and watched the *Parakeet's* captain as he walked briskly across and across, and presently, when the little sailor faced him, he nodded as though he had decided something that was in his thoughts.

"Well, sir?" said Captain Kettle.

"I wish you wouldn't look so anxious. We've started now, and may as well make up our minds to go through it comfortably."

"Quite so," said Kettle. "I'm thinking out how we are to do this business in comfort—and safety," and with that he resumed his walk.

The man beside him had introduced himself when the black workers were carrying the *Parakeet's* cargo of coal in baskets from the holds to the

lighters alongside; and Kettle had been rather startled to find that he carried a letter of introduction from the steamboat's owners. The letter gave him no choice of procedure. It stated with clearness that Mr. Hugh Wenlock, solicitor, had laid his wishes before them, and that they had agreed to further these wishes (through the agency of their servant—Captain Owen Kettle) in consideration of the payment of £200 sterling.

The *Parakeet* was a cargo tramp, and carried no passenger certificate, but a letter of recommendation like this was equivalent to a direct order, and Kettle signed Mr. Wenlock on to his crew list as "Doctor," and put to sea with an anxious mind.

Wenlock waited awhile, watching squalid Suez sink into the sea behind; and then he spoke again.

"Look here, Captain," he said, "those South Arabian ports have got a lot worse reputation than they really deserve. The people down there twenty years ago were a pack of pirates, I'll grant you, but nowadays they know that if they get at any of their old games, a British gunboat promptly comes up next week and bombards them at two-mile range, and that's not good enough. They may not be honest from inclination, but they've got the fear of the gunboat always handy, and that's a wonderful civilizing power. I tell you, captain, you needn't be frightened; that pirate business is exploded for now and always."

"I know all about the piratical hankerings of those South Arabian niggers, sir," said Kettle stiffly, "and I know what they can do and what they can't do as well as any man living. And I know also what I can do myself at a push, and the knowledge leaves me pretty comfortable. But

if you choose to think me frightened, I'll own I am. It's the navigation down there that gave me cold shivers the first moment you mentioned it."

"Why, it's no worse than the Red Sea here, anyway."

"Red Sea's bad, but you can get good charts of it and rely on them. South Arabian coast is no better, and the charts aren't worth the paper they're printed on. There are bad tide-rips down there, sir, and there are bad reefs, and there's bad fog, and the truth of it is, there's no handier place to lose a ship in all the big, wide world."

"I wouldn't like you to wreck the steamer down there. It might be awkward for me getting back."

"Quite so," said Kettle, "you're thinking of yourself, and I don't blame you. I'm thinking of myself also. I'm a man that's met a great deal of misfortune, sir, and from one thing and another I've been eight years without a regular command. I had the luck to bring in a derelict the other day, and pocket a good salvage out of her, and my present owners heard of it, and they put me as master of this steamer, just because of that luck."

"Nothing like luck."

"If you don't lose it. But I am not anxious to pile up this steamboat on some uncharted reef just because luck has left me, and have to wait another eight years before I find another command."

"And, as I say, I'm as keen as you are not to get the steamer wrecked, and if there's any way she can be kept out of a dangerous area, and you can manage to set me ashore where I want in a boat, just you say, and I'll meet you all I can. But at the same time, Skipper, if you don't mind doing a swap, you

might give me a good deal of help over my matter in return."

"I haven't heard your business yet, sir. All you've told me is that you want to be set down in this place, Dunkhot, and be taken off again after you've stayed there four-and-twenty hours."

"Well, you see I didn't want it talked over beforehand. If the newspapers got hold of the yarn, and made a lot of fuss about it, they might upset a certain marriage that I've very much set my heart upon."

Captain Kettle looked puzzled. "I don't seem to quite follow you, sir."

"You shall hear the tale from the beginning. We have plenty of time ahead of us just now. You remember the wreck of the *Rangoon?*"

"She was coming home from East Indian ports, wasn't she, and got on fire somewhere off Cape Guardafui? But that'll have been twenty years back, in the old overland days, before the Ditch was opened. Only about ten of her people saved, if I remember."

"That's about right," said Wenlock, "though it's twenty years ago now. She was full of Anglo-Indians, and their loss made a great sensation at the time. Amongst others was a Colonel Anderson, and his wife, and their child Teresa, aged nine; and what made their deaths all the more sad was the fact that Anderson's elder brother died just a week before, and he would have come home to find a peerage and large estates waiting for him."

"I can feel for that man," said Kettle.

"I can feel most for the daughter," said Wenlock.

"How do you mean, sir?"

"Well, Colonel Anderson's dead, and his wife's

dead, but the daughter isn't, or at any rate she was very much alive twelve months ago, that's all. The whole lot of them, with others, got into one of the *Rangoon's* boats, and after frizzling about at sea till they were nearly starved, got chucked on that South Arabian coast (which you say is so rocky and dangerous), and were drowned in the process. All barring Teresa, that is. She was pulled out of the water by the local niggers, and was brought up by them, and I've absolutely certain information that not a year ago she was living in Dunkhot as quite a big personage in her way."

"And she's 'My Lady' now, if she only knew?"

"Well, not that. The title doesn't descend in the female line, but Colonel Anderson made a will in her favor after she was born, and the present earl, who's got the estates, would have to shell out if she turned up again."

"My owners, in their letter, mentioned that you were a solicitor. Then you are employed by his lordship, sir?"

Mr. Wenlock laughed. "Not much," he said. "I'm on my own hook. Why, hang it all, Captain, you must see that no man of his own free will would be idiot enough to resurrect a long-forgotten niece just to make himself into a beggar."

"I don't see why not, sir, if he got to know she was alive. Some men have consciences, and even a lord, I suppose, is a man."

"The present earl has far too good a time of it to worry about running a conscience. No, I bet he fights like a thief for the plunder, however clear a case we have to show him. And as he's the man in possession and has plenty of ready cash for law expenses, the odds are he'll turn out too big to

worry at through all the courts, and we shall compromise. I'd like that best myself. Cash down has a desirable feel about it."

"It has, sir," said Kettle with a reminiscent sigh. "Even to pocket a tenth of what is rightfully yours is better than getting mixed up with that beastly law. But will the other relatives of the young lady, those that are employing you, I mean, agree to that?"

"Don't I tell you, Captain, I'm on my own hook? There are no other relatives—or at least none that would take a ha'porth of interest in Teresa's getting the estates. I've gone into the thing on sheer spec, and for what I can make out of it, and that, if all's well, will be the whole lump."

"But how? The young lady may give you something in her gratitude, of course, but you can't expect it all."

"I do, though, and I tell you how I'm going to get it. I shall marry the fair Teresa. Simple as tumbling off a house."

Kettle drew himself up stiffly and walked to the other end of the bridge, and began ostentatiously to look with a professional eye over his vessel.

Wenlock was quick to see the change. "Come, what is it now, Captain?" he asked with some surprise.

"I don't like the idea of those sort of marriages," said the little sailor, acidly.

Wenlock shrugged his shoulders good-humoredly.

"Neither do I, and if I were a rich man, I wouldn't have dreamed of it. Just think of what the girl probably is: she's been with those niggers since she was quite a kid; she'll be quite uneducated; I'm in hopes she's good-looking and has a decent

figure; but at the best she'll be quite unpresentable till I've had her in hand for at least a couple of years, if then. Of course you'll say there's 'romance' about the thing. But then I don't care tuppence about romance, and anyway it's beastly uncomfortable to live with."

"I was not looking at that point of view."

"Let me tell you how I was fixed," said Wenlock with a burst of confidence. "I'd a small capital. So I qualified as a solicitor, and put up a door-plate, and waited for a practice. It didn't come. Not a client drifted near me from month's end to month's end. And meanwhile the capital was dribbling away. I felt I was getting on my back legs; it was either a case of the Colonies or the workhouse, and I'd no taste for either; and when the news of this girl Teresa came, I tell you I just jumped at the chance. I don't want to marry her, of course; there are ten other girls I'd rather have as wife; but there was no other way out of the difficulty, so I just swallowed my squeamishness for good and always. See?"

"It was Miss Teresa Anderson I was pitying," said Kettle pointedly.

"Good Lord, man, why? Isn't it the finest thing in the world for her?"

"It might be fine to get away from where she is, and land home to find a nice property waiting. But I don't care to see a woman have a husband forced on her. It would be nobler of you, Mr. Wenlock, to let the young lady get to England, and look round her for a while, and make her own choice."

"I'm too hard up to be noble," said Wenlock drily. "I've not come here on philanthropy, and marrying

that girl is part of my business. Besides, hang it all, man, think of what she is, and think of what I am." He looked himself up and down with a half humorous smile—"I know nice people at home who would be civil to her, and after all, hang it, I'm not unmarriageable personally."

"Still," said Kettle doggedly, "I don't like the idea of it."

"Then let me give you an inducement. I said I was not down here on philanthropy, and I don't suppose you are either. You'll have my passage money?"

"Two and a-half per cent. of it is my commission. The rest goes to the owners, of course."

"Very well, then. In addition to that, if you'll help this marriage on in the way I ask, I'll give you £50."

"There's no man living who could do more usefully with £50 if I saw my way of fingering it."

"I think I see what you mean. No, you won't have to wait for it. I've got the money here in hard cash in my pocket ready for you to take over the minute it's earned."

"I was wondering, sir, if I could earn it honorably. You must give me time to think this out. I'll try and give you an answer after tea. And for the present I shall have to leave you. I've got to go through the ship's papers: I have to be my own clerk on board here just now, though the Company did certainly promise me a much better ship if I beat up plenty of cargo, and made a good voyage of it with this."

The *Parakeet* worked her way along down the Red Sea at her steady nine knots, and Mr. Hugh Wenlock put a couple of bunk pillows on a canvas

boat-cover under the bridge deck awnings, and lay there and amused himself with cigarettes and a magazine. Captain Owen Kettle sat before a table in the chart-house with his head on one side, and a pen in his fingers, and went through accounts. But though Wenlock, when he had finished his magazine, quickly went off to sleep, Captain Kettle's struggles with arithmetic were violent enough to keep him very thoroughly awake, and when a due proportion of the figures had been checked, he put the papers in a drawer, and was quite ready to tackle the next subject.

He had not seen necessary to mention the fact to Mr. Wenlock, but while that young man was talking of the Miss Teresa Anderson, who at present was "quite a big personage in her way" at Dunkhot, a memory had come to him that he had heard of the lady before in somewhat less prosaic terms. All sailormen who have done business on the great sea highway between West and East during recent years have had the yarn given to them at one time or another, and most of them have regarded it as gratuitous legend. Kettle was one of these. But he was beginning to think there was something more in it than a mere sailor's yarn, and he was anxious to see if there was any new variation in the telling.

So he sent for Murray, his mate, a smart young sailor of the newer school, who preferred to be called "chief officer," made him sit, and commenced talk of a purely professional nature. Finally he said: "And since I saw you last, the schedule's changed. We call in at Dunkhot, for that passenger Mr. Wenlock to do some private business ashore, before we go on to our Persian Gulf ports."

Murray repeated the name thoughtfully. "Dunkhot? Let's see, that's on the South Arabian coast, about a day's steam from Aden, and a beast of a place to get at, so I've heard. Oh, and of course, that's the place where the She-Sultan, or Queen, or whatever she calls herself, is boss."

"So there is really a woman of that kind there, is there? I'd heard of her, like everybody else has, but I thought she was only a yarn."

"No, she's there in the flesh, sir, right enough; lots of flesh, according to what I've gathered. A serang of one of the B. and I. boats, who'd been in Dunkhot, told me about her only last year. She makes war, leads her troops, cuts off heads, and does the Eastern potentate up to the mark. The serang said she was English, too, though I don't believe much in that. One-tenth English would probably be more near the truth. The odds are she'll be Eurasian, and those snuff-and-butter colored ladies, when they get amongst people blacker than themselves, always try to ignore their own lick of the tar-brush."

"Fat, is she?"

"The serang said she was a big buffalo bull of a woman, with a terror of a temper. I don't know what's Mr. Wenlock's business, sir; but whether he wants to start a dry-goods agency, or merely to arrange for smuggling in some rifles, he'd better make up his mind to square her first and foremost. She will have a finger in every pie. She's as curious as a monkey, too, and there's no doing anything without letting her know. And when she says a thing, it's got to be done."

"Is she the head chief's favorite wife, then?"

"That's the funny part of it: she isn't married.

These Orientals always get husbands early as a general thing, and you'd have thought that in her juvenile days, before she got power, they'd have married her to some one about the town, whether she liked it or not. But it seems they didn't, because she said she'd certainly poison any man if they sent her into his zenana. And later on, when she came to be boss, she still kept to spinsterhood. Guess there wasn't any man about the place white enough to suit her taste."

"H'm. What you've told me seems to let daylight on to things."

"Beg pardon, sir?"

Captain Kettle put his hand kindly on Murray's shoulder. "Don't ask me to explain now, my lad, but when the joke comes you shall share the laugh. There's a young man on this ship (I don't mind telling you in confidence) whose ways I don't quite like, and I think he's going to get a lesson."

He went out then under the awnings of the bridge deck, and told Wenlock that he would probably be able to earn his fee for helping on the marriage, and Wenlock confidently thought that he quite understood the situation.

"Skipper's a bit of a methody," thought Mr. Hugh Wenlock, "but his principles don't go very deep when there are fifty sovereigns to be earned. Well, he's a useful man, and if he gets me snugly married to that little girl, he'll be cheap at the price."

The *Parakeet's* voyage to Dunkhot was not swift. Eight-and-a-half knots was her most economical pace for coal consumption, and at that gait she steamed. With a reputation to make with his new owners, and two and a-half per cent. commission on all profits, Kettle had developed into a regular

glutton for cargo; and the knowledge of men and places which he had so laboriously acquired in former days served him finely. Three times he got doles of cargo at good stiff freights at points where few other men would have dreamed of looking. He was an ideal man for the master of an ocean tramp. He was exactly honest; he had a world of misfortunes behind to spur him on; he was quick of decision; and he had developed a nose for cargo, and a knack of extorting it from merchants, that were little short of miraculous. And, in fact, if things went on as they had started, he stood a very good chance of making 50 per cent. on the *Parakeet*'s capital for the voyage, and so earning promotion to one of the firm's better ships.

But though in the many days of his adversity Captain Kettle had never shunned any risks which came in his way, with this new prosperity fresh and pleasant at his feet, he was beginning to tell himself that risks were foolish things. He arrived off Dunkhot and rang off his engines, and frowned angrily at the shore.

The town stood on an eminence, snugly walled, and filled with cool, square houses. At one side, the high minaret of a mosque stood up like a bayonet, and at the other, standing in a ring of garden, was a larger building, which seemed to call itself palace. There was a small fringe of cultivation beside the walls of the town, and beyond was arid desert, which danced and shimmered under the violent sun.

But all this lay small and far off, like a tiny picture in some huge frame, and showing only through the glass. A maze of reefs guarded the shore, and tore up the sleek Indian Ocean swells into spouting breakers; and though there was

anchorage inside, tenanted indeed by a score of sailing craft, the way to it was openly perilous. And so for the present the *Parakeet* lay to, rolling outside the entrance, flying a pilot jack, and waiting developments.

Captain Kettle might have his disquieting thoughts, still outwardly he was cool. But Mr. Hugh Wenlock was on deck in the sprucest of his apparel, and was visibly anxious and fidgety, as befitted a man who shortly expected to enter into the bonds of matrimony.

A double-ended boat came off presently, manned by naked Arabs, and steered by a man in a white burnous. She swept up alongside, caught a rope and made fast, and the man in white introduced himself as a pilot. They are all good Mohammedans down there, or nominally, and so of course there was no question of a clean bill of health. Islam is not impious enough to check the spread of any disease which Allah may see good to send for its chastening.

The pilot wanted to take them in at once. He spoke some English, and carried an air of confidence. He could guide them through the reefs in the most complete of safety, and he could guarantee fine openings for trade, once inside.

"I dare say," grunted Kettle under his breath, "but you're a heap too uncertificated for my taste. Why, you don't even offer a book of forged logs to try and work off your humbug with some look of truth. No, I know the kind of pilot you are. You'd pile up the steamboat on the first convenient reef, and then be one of the first to come and loot her."—He turned to Murray: "Now, look here, Mr. Mate. I'll leave you in charge, and see you keep steam up and

don't leave the deck. Don't let any of these niggers come on board on any pretence whatever, and if they try it on, steam out to sea. I'll get through Mr. Wenlock's business ashore as quick as I can, and perhaps pick up a ton or two of cargo for ourselves."

Below, in the dancing boat which ground against the steamer's side, the pilot clamored that a ladder might be thrown to him so that he might come on board and take the *Parakeet* forthwith into the anchorage; and to him again Kettle turned, and temporized. He must go ashore himself first, he said, and see what offer there was of trade, before he took the steamer in. To which the pilot, though visibly disappointed, saw fit to agree, as no better offer was forthcoming.

"Now, sir," said Kettle to Wenlock, "into the boat with you. The less time that's wasted, the better I shall be pleased."

"All right," said Wenlock, pointing to a big package on the deck. "Just tell some of your men to shove that case down into the boat, and I'm ready."

Kettle eyed the bulky box with disfavor. "What's in it?" he asked.

"A present or a bribe; whichever you care to call it. If you want to know precisely, it's rifles. I thought they would be most acceptable."

"Rifles are liked hereabouts. Is it for a sort of introductory present?"

"Well, if you must know, Captain, it's occurred to me that Teresa is probably an occupant of somebody's harem, and that I shall have to buy her off from her husband. Hence the case of rifles."

A queer look came over Captain Kettle's face.

"And you'd still marry this woman if she had another husband living?"

"Of course. Haven't I told you that I've thought the whole thing thoroughly over already, and I'm not inclined to stick at trifles? But I may tell you that divorce is easy in these Mohammedan countries, and I shall take care to get the girl set legally free before we get away from here. You don't catch me getting mixed with bigamy."

"But tell me. Is a Mohammedan marriage made here binding for an Englishman?"

"It's as legally binding as if the Archbishop of Canterbury tied the knot."

"Very well," said Kettle. "Now let me tell you, sir, for the last time, that I don't like what you're going to do. To my mind, it's not a nice thing marrying a woman that you evidently despise, just for her money."

Wenlock flushed. "Look here," he said, "I refuse to be lectured, especially by you. Aren't you under promise to get £50 from me the moment I'm safely married? And didn't you fairly jump at the chance of fingering it."

Captain Kettle did not hit this man who cast such an unpleasant imputation on him; he did not even let him feel the lash of his tongue in return. He merely smiled grimly, and said: "Get down into the boat, you and your case of rifles."

For the moment Wenlock started and hesitated. He seemed to detect something ominous in this order. But then he took a brace on his courage, and after a couple of deck hands had lowered the rifles into the dancing boat, he clambered gingerly down after them, and sat himself beside the white-robed man in the stern sheets. Kettle followed, and

the boat headed off for the opening between the reefs.

The Indian Ocean swells swung beneath them, and presently were breaking on the grim stone barriers on either hand in a roar of sound. The triangular dorsal fins of a couple of sharks convoyed them in, in case of accidents; and overhead a crowd of sea-fowl screamed and swooped and circled. But none of these things interested them. The town ahead, which jerked nearer to every tug of the oars, held the eye. In it was Teresa Anderson, heiress, a personage of whom each of them had his own private conception. In it also were fanatical Arabs, whom they hoped the fear of shadowy British gunboats would deter from open piracy.

The boat passed between a cluster of ragged shipping which swayed at the anchorage, and Wenlock might have stared with curious eyes (had he been so minded) on real dhows which had even then got real slaves ready for market in their stuffy 'tween decks. But he was gazing with a fascinated stare at the town. Over the arch of the water-gate, for which they were heading, was what at first appeared to be a frieze of small rounded balls; but a nearer view resolved these into human heads, in various stages of desiccation. Evidently justice in Dunkhot was determined that the criminal who once passed through its hands should no more tread the paths of unrighteousness.

The boat landed against a jetty of stone, and they stepped out dryshod. Wenlock stared at the gate with its dressing of heads as though they fascinated him.

"And Teresa will have been brought up within sight of all this," he murmured to himself, "and will

be accustomed to it. Fancy marrying a woman who has spent twenty years of her life in the neighborhood of all this savagery."

"Strong place in its way," said Kettle, squinting up at the brass cannon on the walls. "Those guns up there are well kept, you can see. Of course one of our cheapest fourpenny gunboats could knock the whole shop into bricks in half an hour at three-mile range; but it's strong enough to hold out against any niggers along the coast here, and that's all the Queen here aims at. By the way, Emir, not Queen, is what she calls herself, so the pilot tells me. I suppose she thinks that as she's doing a man's job in a man's way, she may as well take a full man's ticket."

They passed in through the gate, the sentries staring at them curiously, and once inside, in the full heat and smell of the narrow street beyond, Wenlock said: "Look here, Skipper, you're resourceful, and you know these out-of-the-way places. How had we better start to find the girl?"

Kettle glanced coolly round at the grim buildings and the savage Arabs who jostled them, and said, with fine sarcasm: "Well, sir, as there doesn't appear to be a policeman about, I should recommend you to apply at the post office."

'I don't want to be mocked."

"Then, if you'll take the tip from me, you'll crowd back to my steamboat as fast as you can go. You'll find it healthier."

"I'm going on with it," said Wenlock doggedly. "And I ask you to earn your £50, and give me help."

"Then, if you distinctly ask me to help you on into trouble like that, of course, the best thing to do is to go straight on to the palace."

"Show the way, then," said Wenlock curtly.

Kettle gave the word to the white-robed pilot, and together they set off down the narrow winding streets, with an ever-increasing train of Arabs and negroes following in their wake. Wenlock said nothing as he walked, but it was evident from the working of his face that his mind was very full. But Kettle looked about him with open interest, and thoughts in verse about this Eastern town came to him with pleasant readiness.

The royal residence was the large building encircled with gardens which they had seen from the sea, and they entered it with little formality. There was no trouble either about obtaining an audience. The Lady Emir had, it appeared, seen the steamer's approach with her own eyes; indeed, the whole of Dunkhot was excited by such an unusual arrival; and the Head of the State was as human in her curiosity as the meanest nigger among her subjects.

The audience hall was imposing. It was bare enough, according to the rule of those heated Eastern lands, but it had an air of comfort and coolness, and in those parts where it was not severely plain, the beauty of its architecture was delicious. Armed guards to the number of some forty men were posted round the walls, and at the further end, apparently belonging to the civil population, were some dozen other men squatting on the floor. In the centre of the room was a naked wretch in chains; but sentence was hurriedly pronounced on him, and he was hustled away as the two Englishmen entered, and they found themselves face to face with the only woman in the room, the supreme ruler of this savage South Arabian coast town.

She was seated on a raised divan, propped by cushions, and in front of her was a huge water-pipe at which she occasionally took a meditative pull. She was dressed quite in Oriental fashion, in trousers, zouave jacket, sash, and all the rest of it; but she was unmistakably English in features, though strongly suggestive of the Boadicea. She was a large, heavily-boned woman, enormously covered with flesh, and she dandled across her knees that very unfeminine sceptre, an English cavalryman's sword. But the eye neglected these details, and was irresistibly drawn by the strongness of her face. Even Kettle was almost awed by it.

But Captain Owen Kettle was not a man who could be kept in awe for long. He took off his helmet, marched briskly up toward the divan, and bowed.

"Good afternoon, your Ladyship," he said. "I trust I see you well. I'm Captain Kettle, master of that steamboat now lying in your roads, and this is Mr. Wenlock, a passenger of mine, who heard that you were English, and has come to put you in the way of some property at home."

The lady sat more upright, and set back her great shoulders. "I am English," she said. "I was called in the Giaour faith Teresa Anderson."

"That's the name," said Kettle. "Mr. Wenlock's come to take you away to step into a nice thing at home."

"I am Emir here. Am I asked to be Emir in your country?"

"Why, no," said Kettle; "that job's filled already, and we aren't thinking of making a change. Our present Emir in England (who, by the way, is a lady like yourself) seems to suit us very well. No,

you'll be an ordinary small-potato citizen, like everybody else, and you will probably find it a bit of a change."

"I do not onderstand," said the woman. "I have not spoke your language since I was child. Speak what you say again."

"I'll leave it to Mr. Wenlock, your Majesty, if you've no objections, as he's the party mostly interested; and if you'd ask one of your young men to bring me a long drink and a chair, I'll be obliged. It's been a hot walk up here. I see you don't mind smoke," he added, and lit a cheroot.

Now, it was clear from the attitude of the guards and the civilians present, that Kettle was jostling heavily upon court etiquette, and at first the Lady Emir was very clearly inclined to resent it, and had sharp orders for repression ready upon her lips. But she changed her mind, perhaps through some memory that by blood she was related to this nonchalant race; and presently cushions were brought, on which Captain Kettle bestowed himself tailor-fashion (with his back cautiously up against a wall), and then a negro slave knelt before him and offered sweet sticky sherbet, which he drank with a wry face.

But in the mean while Mr. Wenlock was stating his case with small forensic eloquence. The sight of Miss Teresa Anderson in the flesh awed him. He had pictured to himself some slim, quiet exile, perhaps a little gauche and timid, but at any rate amenable to instruction and to his will. He had forgotten the developing power of tropical suns. The woman before him, whose actual age was twenty-nine, looked fifty, and even for a desperate man like himself was impossible as a wife in England.

He felt daunted before her already. It flashed through his mind that it was she who had ordered those grisly heads to be stuck above the water-gate, and he heartily wished himself away back on the steamer, tramping for cargo. He was not wanting in pluck as a usual thing, this unsuccessful solicitor, but before a woman like this, with such a record behind her, a man may well be scared and yet not be accused of cowardice.

But the Lady Emir looked on Wenlock in a very different way to that in which she had regarded Kettle. Mr. Wenlock possessed (as indeed he had himself pointed out on the *Parakeet*) a fine outward appearance, and in fact anywhere he could have been remarked on as a personable man. And things came about as Kettle shrewdly anticipated they would. The Lady Emir had not remained unmarried all these years through sheer distaste for matrimony. She had been celibate through an unconquerable pride of blood. None but men of colored race had been around her in all her wars, her governings, and her diplomacies; and always she had been too proud to mate with them. But here now stood before her a male of her own race, handsome, upstanding, and obviously impressed by her power and majesty. He would not rule her; he would not even attempt a mastery; she would still be Emir—and a wife. The chance had never occurred to her before; might never occur again. She was quick to make her decision.

Ruling potentates are not as other folk with their love affairs, and the Lady Emir of Dunkhot (forgetting that she was once Teresa Anderson, and a modest English maiden) unconsciously fell in with the rule of her caste. The English speech, long

disused, came to her unhandily, but the purport of what she said was plain. She made proclamation that the Englishman Wenlock should there and then become her husband, and let slaves fetch the mullah to unite them before the sun had dropped below another bar of the windows.

She did not ask her future husband's wishes or his permission. She simply stated her sovereign will and looked that it should be carried out forthwith.

A couple of slaves scurried out on their missions—evidently their Emir was accustomed to have her orders carried out with promptness—and for long enough Wenlock stood wordless in front of the divan, far more like a criminal than a prospective bridegroom. The lady, with the tube of the water-pipe between her lips, puffed smoke and made no further speech. She had stated her will: the result would follow in due course.

But at last Wenlock, as though wrenching himself into wakefulness out of some horrid dream, turned wildly to Kettle, and in a torrent of words implored for rescue.

The little sailor heard him quite unmoved. "You asked my help," he said, "in a certain matter, and I've given it, and things have turned out just as I've guessed they would. You maundered about your dear Teresa on my steamboat till I was nearly sick, and, by James! you've got her now, and no error about it."

"But you said you didn't approve," cried the wretched man.

"I quite know what I said," retorted Kettle grimly. "I didn't approve of your way. But this is different. You're not a very fine specimen, but anyway you're English, and it does good to the old

"I'M A BRITISH SUBJECT."

[*Page* 205.

shop at home to have English people for kings and queens of foreign countries. I've got a theory about that."

Now the Lady Emir was not listening to all this tirade by any means unmoved. To begin with, it was not etiquette to speak at all in her presence if unaddressed, and to go on with, although she did not understand one word in ten of what was being spoken, she gathered the gist of it, and this did not tend to compose her. She threw away the snaky stem of water-pipe, and gripped both hands on the trooper's sword, till the muscles stood out in high relief.

"Do you say," she demanded, "you onwilling marry me?"

"Yes," said Wenlock, with sullen emphasis.

She turned her head, and gave orders in Arabic. With marvellous readiness, as though it was one of the regular appointments of the place, a couple of the guards trundled a stained wooden block into the middle of the floor, another took his station beside it with an ominous-looking axe poised over his shoulder, and almost before Wenlock knew what was happening, he was pinned by a dozen men at wrist and ankle, and thrust down to kneel with his neck over the block.

"Do you say," the Lady Emir repeated, "you onwilling marry me?"

"I'm a British subject," Wenlock shouted. "I've a Foreign Office passport in my pocket. I'll appeal to my Government over this."

"My lad," said Kettle, "you won't have time to appeal. The lady isn't being funny. She means square biz. If you don't be sensible, and see things in the same way she does, it'll be one *che-opp*, and what happens afterward won't interest you."

"Those spikes," said Wenlock faintly.

"Above the water-gate?" said Kettle. "Queer, but the same thing occurred to me, too. You'd feel a bit lonely stuck up there getting sun-dried."

"I'll marry her."

"You'd better spread a bit more politeness about," Kettle advised. "It will be all the more comfortable for you afterward if you do." And so Wenlock, with desperation nerving him, poured out all the pretty speeches which he had in store, and which he had looked to use to this very woman under such very different circumstances. But he did not even suggest taking his future spouse back to England.

She, too, when she graciously pardoned his previous outburst, mentioned her decision on this matter also.

"I am Emir here," she said, "and I could not be Emir in your England without many fights. So here I shall stay, and you with me. When there is war, you shall ride at my side; in peace I will give you a governorship over a ward of this town, from which you can get your taxes. And if there are children, you shall bring them up."

The mullah, who knew better than to keep his ruler waiting, had come in, and they were forthwith married, solemnly and irrevocably, according to the rites and ceremonies of the Mohammedan Church, as practised in the kingdom of Dunkhot. And in witness thereof, Captain Kettle wrote his name from left to right, in contradistinction to all the other signatories, who wrote from right to left, except the bridegroom.

"And now, Mr. Wenlock, if you please," said Kettle, "as you're comfortably tied to the lady of your

choice, I'll trouble you for that fee you promised."

"I'll see you in somewhere hotter than Arabia," said the bridegroom, mopping his pale face.

"Now look," said Kettle, "I'm not going to scrap with you here, and I don't want to break up this happy home with domestic unpleasantness; but if you don't hand me over that £50, I shall ask your good lady to get it for me."

Wenlock sullenly handed out a note.

"Thank you. I know you feel injured, but I'm earning this money exactly according to promise, and of you don't quite like what's been done, you must remember that it's your own fault for not wording the agreement a bit more carefully. And now, as I seem to have got through my business here, if it's agreeable to all parties, I'll be going. Good-by, Mrs. Wenlock, madam. Let me call you by your name for the first time."

The Lady Emir set back her great shoulders. "That is not my name," she said. "I am Emir. My name does not change."

"Beg pardon," said Kettle, "he takes yours, does he? Didn't know that was the custom of this country. Well, good-afternoon."

"But do you want," said the lady, "no present?"

"Thank you," said Kettle, with a cock of the head, "but I take presents from no one. What bit of a living I get, your ladyship, I earn."

"I do not onderstand. But you are sailor. You have ship. You wish cargo?"

Captain Kettle snapped his fingers ecstatically. "Now, ma'am, there you've hit it. Cargo's what I do want. I'll have to tell you that freights are up a good deal just now, and you'll have to pay for

accommodation, but my ship's a good one, and my firm's reliable, and will see that you are dealt by honest at the other end."

"I do not onderstand."

"Of course you don't, your Majesty; of course you don't. Ladies like you don't have to bother with the shipping trade. But just you give me a line to the principal merchants in the town saying that you'd like me to have a few tons of their stuff, and that'll do. I guess that what your ladyship likes round here is usually done."

"You wish me write. I will write. Now we will wash hands, and there is banquet."

And so it came to pass that, some twenty-four hours later, Captain Kettle returned to the *Parakeet* sun-scorched, and flushed with success, and relieved the anxious Murray from his watch. The mate was naturally curious to know what happened ashore.

"Let me get a glass of Christian beer to wash all their sticky nastinesses from my neck, and I'll tell you," said Kettle, and he did with fine detail and circumstance.

"Well, Wenlock's got his heiress anyway," said Murray, with a sigh, when the tale was over. "I suppose we may as well get under way now, sir."

"Not much," said Kettle jubilantly. "Why, man, I've squeezed every ton of cargo they have in the place, and stuck them for freights in a way that would surprise you. Here's the tally: 270 bags of coffee, 700 packets of dates, 350 baskets of figs, and all for London. And, mark you," said Kettle, hitting the table, "that or more'll be waiting for me there every time I come, and no other skipper need apply."

"H'm," said the mate thoughtfully; "but will Wenlock be as civil and limp next time you call, sir?'

Captain Kettle winked pleasantly, and put a fifty-pound note in his lock-up drawer. "That's all right, my lad. No fear of Master Wenlock getting his tail up. If you'd seen the good lady, his wife, you'd know why. That's the man that went hunting an heiress, Mr. Murray; and by the holy James he's got her, and no error."

CHAPTER IX

A MATTER OF JUSTICE

It was quite evident that the man wanted something; but Captain Kettle did not choose definitely to ask for his wishes. Over-curiosity is not a thing that pays with Orientals. Stolid indifference, on the other hand, may earn easy admiration.

But at last the man took his courage in a firmer grip, and came up from the *Parakeet's* lower deck, where the hands were working cargo, and advanced under the bridge deck awnings to Captain Kettle's long chair and salaamed low before him.

Kettle seemed to see the man for the first time. He looked up from the accounts he was laboring at. "Well?" he said, curtly.

It was clear the Arab had no English. It was clear also that he feared being watched by his fellow countrymen in the lighter which was discharging date bags alongside. He manoeuvred till the broad of his back covered his movements, materialized somehow or other a scrap of paper from some fold of his burnous, dropped this into Kettle's lap without any perceptible movement of either his arms or hands, and then gave another stately salaam and moved away to the place from which he had come.

"If you are an out-of-work conjuror," said Kettle to the retreating figure, "you've come to the wrong place to get employment here."

The Arab passed out of sight without once turning

his head, and Kettle glanced down at the screw of paper which lay on his knees, and saw on it a scrawl of writing.

"Hullo," he said, "postman, were you; not conjuror? I didn't expect any mail here. However, let's see. Murray's writing, by James!" he muttered, as he flattened out the grimy scrap of paper, and then he whistled with surprise and disgust as he read.

"*Dear Captain,*" the letter ran. "*I've got into the deuce of a mess, and if you can bear a hand to pull me out, it would be a favor I should never forget. I got caught up that side street to the left past the mosque, but they covered my head with a cloth directly after, and hustled me on for half an hour, and where I am now, the dickens only knows. It's a cellar. But perhaps bearer may know, who's got my watch. The trouble was about a woman, a pretty little piece who I was photographing. You see*——"

And here the letter broke off.

"That's the worst of these fancy, high-toned mates," Kettle grumbled. "What does he want to go ashore for at a one-eyed hole like this? There are no saloons—and besides he isn't a drinking man. Your new-fashioned mate isn't. There are no girls for him to kiss—seeing that they are all Mohammedans, and wear a veil. And as for going round with that photography box of his, I wonder he hasn't more pride. I don't like to see a smart young fellow like him, that's got his master's ticket all new and ready in his chest, bringing himself down to the level of a common, dirty-haired artist. Well, Murray's got a lot to learn before he finds an owner fit to trust him with a ship of his own."

Kettle read the hurried letter through a second time, and then got up out of his long chair, and put on his spruce white drill uniform coat, and exchanged his white canvas shoes for another pair more newly pipeclayed. His steamer might merely be a common cargo tramp, the town he was going to visit ashore might be merely the usual savage settlement one meets with on the Arabian shore of the Persian Gulf, but the little sailor did not dress for the admiration of fashionable crowds. He was smart and spruce always out of deference to his own self-respect.

He went up to the second mate at the tally desk on the main deck below, and gave him some instructions. "I'm going ashore," he said, "and leave you in charge. Don't let too many of these niggers come aboard at once, and tell the steward to keep all the doors to below snugly fastened. I locked the chart-house myself when I came out. Have you heard about the mate?"

"No, sir."

"Ah, I thought the news would have been spread well about the ship before it came to me. He's got in trouble ashore, and I suppose I must go, and see the Kady, and get him bailed out."

The second mate wiped the dust and perspiration from his face with his bare arm, and leant on the tally-desk, and grinned. Here seemed to be an opportunity for the relaxation of stiff official relations. "What's tripped him?" he asked. "Skirt or photographing?"

"He will probably tell you himself when he comes back," said Kettle coldly. "I shall send him to his room for three days when he gets on board."

The second mate pulled his face into seriousness.

"I don't suppose he got into trouble intentionally, sir."

"Probably not, but that doesn't alter the fact that he has managed it somehow. I don't engage my mates for amusements of that kind, Mr. Grain. I've got them here to work, and help me do my duty by the owners. If they take up low class trades like artisting, they must be prepared to stand the consequences. You'll remember the orders I've given you? If I'm wanted, you'll say I'll probably be back by tea."

Captain Kettle went off then in a shore-boat, past a small fleet of pearling dhows, which rolled at their anchors, and after a long pull—for the sea was shallow, and the anchorage lay five miles out—stepped on to the back of a burly Arab, and was carried the last mile dry-shod. Parallel to him were lines of men carrying out cargo to the lighters which would tranship it to the *Parakeet*, and Kettle looked upon these with a fine complacency.

His tramping for cargo had been phenomenally successful. He was filling his holds at astonishingly heavy freights. And not only would this bring him credit with his owners, which meant promotion in due course to a larger ship, but in the mean time, as he drew his 2½ per cent. on the profits, it represented a very comfortable matter of solid cash for that much-needing person himself. He hugged himself with pleasure when he thought of this new-found prosperity. It represented so many things which he would be able to do for his wife and family, which through so many years narrow circumstances had made impossible.

The burly Arab on whose hips he rode pick-a-back stepped out of the water at last, and Kettle jumped

down from his perch, and picked his way daintily among the litter of the foreshore toward the white houses of the town which lay beyond.

It was the first time he had set foot there. So great was his luck at the time, that he had not been forced to go ashore in the usual way drumming up cargo. The shippers had come off begging him to become their carrier, and he had mulcted them in heavy freights accordingly. So he stepped into the town with many of the feelings of a conqueror, and demanded to be led to the office of a man with whom he had done profitable business that very morning.

Of course, "office" in the Western meaning of the term there was none. The worthy Rad el Moussa transacted affairs on the floor of his general sitting-room, and stored his merchandise in the bed-chambers, or wherever it would be out of reach of pilfering fingers. But he received the little sailor with fine protestations of regard, and (after some giggles and shuffling as the women withdrew) inducted him to the dark interior of his house, and set before him delicious coffee and some doubtful sweetmeats.

Kettle knew enough about Oriental etiquette not to introduce the matter on which he had come at the outset of the conversation. He passed and received the necessary compliments first, endured a discussion of local trade prospects, and then by an easy gradation led up to the powers of the local Kady. He did not speak Arabic himself, and Rad el Moussa had no English. But they had both served a life apprenticeship to sea trading, and the curse of the Tower of Babel had very little power over them. In the memories of each there were garnered scraps from a score of spoken languages, and when

these failed, they could always draw on the unlimited vocabulary of the gestures and the eyes. And for points that were really abstruse, or which required definite understanding, there always remained the charcoal stick and the explanatory drawing on the face of a whitewashed wall.

When the conversation had lasted some half an hour by the clock, and a slave brought in a second relay of sweetmeats and thick coffee, the sailor mentioned, as it were incidentally, that one of his officers had got into trouble in the town. "It's quite a small thing," he said lightly, "but I want him back as soon as possible, because there's work for him to do on the steamer. See what I mean?"

Rad el Moussa nodded gravely. "Savvy plenty," said he.

Now Kettle knew that the machinery of the law in these small Arabian coast towns was concentrated in the person of the Kady, who, for practical purposes, must be made to move by that lubricant known as palm oil; and so he produced some coins from his pocket and lifted his eyebrows inquiringly.

Rad el Moussa nodded again, and made careful inspection of the coins, turning them one by one with his long brown fingers, and biting those he fancied most as a test of their quality. Finally, he selected a gold twenty-franc piece and two sovereigns, balanced and chinked them carefully in his hand, and then slipped them into some private receptacle in his wearing apparel.

"I say," remarked Kettle, "that's not for you personally, old tintacks. That's for the Kady."

Rad pointed majestically to his own breast. "El Kady," he said.

"Oh, you are his Worship, are you?" said Kettle.

"Why didn't you say so before? I don't think it was quite straight of you, tintacks, but perhaps that's your gentle Arab way. But I say, Whiskers, don't you try being too foxy with me, or you'll get hurt. I'm not the most patient man in the world with inferior nations. Come, now, where's the mate?"

Rad spread his hands helplessly.

"See, here, it's no use your trying that game. You know that I want Murray, my mate."

"Savvy plenty."

"Then hand him out, and let me get away back on board."

"No got," said Rad el Moussa; "no can."

"Now look here, Mister," said Captain Kettle, "I've paid you honestly for justice, and if I don't have it, I'll start in pulling down your old town straight away. Give up the mate, Rad, and let me get back peacefully to my steamboat, or, by James! I'll let loose a wild earthquake here. If you want battle, murder, and sudden death, Mr. Rad el Moussa, just you play monkey tricks with me, and you'll get 'em cheap. Kady, are you? Then, by James! you start in without further talk, and give me the justice that I've bought and paid for."

Though this tirade was in an alien tongue, Rad el Moussa caught the drift from Captain Kettle's accompanying gesticulations, which supplied a running translation as he went on. Rad saw that his visitor meant business, and signed that he would go out and fetch the imprisoned mate forthwith.

"No, you don't," said Kettle promptly. "If your Worship once left here, I might have trouble in finding you again. I know how easy it is to hide in a warren like this town of yours. Send one of your hands with a message."

Now, to convey this sentence more clearly, Kettle had put his fingers on the Arab's clothing, when out fell a bag of pearls, which came unfastened. The pearls rolled like peas about the floor, and the Arab, with gritting teeth, whipped out a knife. Promptly Kettle drew also, and covered him with a revolver.

"See here," he said, "I'm not a thief, though perhaps you think I pulled out that jewelry purse on purpose. It was an accident, Rad, so I'll forgive your hastiness. But your Worship mustn't pull out cutlery on me. I'll not stand that from any man living. That's right, put it up. Back goes the pistol into its pocket, and now we're friends again. Pick up the pearls yourself, and then you'll be certain I haven't grabbed any, and then send one of your men to fetch my mate and do as I want. You're wasting a great deal of my time, Rad el Moussa, over a very simple job."

The Arab gathered the pearls again into the pouch and put it back to its place among his clothes. His face had grown savage and lowering, but it was clear that this little spitfire of a sailor, with his handy pistol, daunted him. Kettle, who read these signs, was not insensible to the compliment they implied, but at the same time he grew, if anything, additionally cautious. He watched his man with a cat-like caution, and when Rad called a slave and gave him orders in fluent Arabic, he made him translate his commands forthwith.

Rad el Moussa protested that he had ordered nothing more than the carrying out of his visitor's wishes. But it seemed to Kettle that he protested just a trifle too vehemently, and his suspicions deepened.

He tapped his pistol in its resting-place, and

nodded his head meaningly. "You've friends in this town," he said, "and I dare say you'll have a goodish bit of power in your small way. I've neither, and I don't deny that if you bring up all your local army to interfere, I may have a toughish fight of it; but whatever happens to me in the long run, you may take it as straight from yours truly that you'll go to your own funeral if trouble starts. So put that in your hookah and smoke it, tintacks, and give me the other tube."

Captain Kettle was used to the dilatory ways of the East, and he was prepared to wait, though never doubting that Murray would be surrendered to him in due time, and he would get his own way in the end. So he picked up one of the snaky tubes of the great pipe, and put the amber mouthpiece between his lips; and there for an hour the pair of them squatted on the divan, with the hookah gurgling and reeking between them. From time to time a slave-girl came and replenished the pipe with tobacco or fire as was required. But these were the only interruptions, and betweenwhiles they smoked on in massive silence.

At the end of that hour, the man-slave who had been sent out with the message re-entered the room and delivered his tidings. Rad el Moussa in his turn passed it on. Murray was even then waiting in the justice chamber, so he said, at the further side of the house, and could be taken away at once. Kettle rose to his feet, and the Arab stood before him with bowed head and folded arms.

Captain Kettle began to feel shame for having pressed this man too hardly. It seemed that he had intended to act honestly all along, and the suspiciousness of his behavior doubtless arose from

some difficulty of custom or language. So the sailor took the Rad's limp hand in his own and shook it cordially, and at the same time made a handsome apology for his own share of the misunderstanding.

"Your Worship must excuse me," he said, "but I'm always apt to be a bit suspicious about lawyers. What dealings I've had with them have nearly always turned out for me unfortunately. And now, if you don't mind, we'll go into your court-house, and you can hand me over my mate, and I'll take him back to the ship. Enough time's been wasted already by both of us."

The Arab, still bowed and submissive, signed toward the doorway, and Kettle marched briskly out along the narrow dark passage beyond, with Rad's sandals shuffling in escort close at his rear. The house seemed a large one, and rambling. Three times Rad's respectful fingers on his visitor's sleeve signed to him a change of route. The corridors, too, as is the custom in Arabia, where coolness is the first consideration, were dimly lit; and with the caution which had grown to be his second nature, Kettle instinctively kept all his senses on the alert for inconvenient surprises. He had no desire that Rad el Moussa should forget his submissiveness and stab him suddenly from behind, neither did he especially wish to be noosed or knifed from round any of the dusky sudden corners.

In fact he was as much on the *qui vive* as he ever had been in all his long, wild, adventurous life, and yet Rad el Moussa, who meant treachery all along, took him captive by the most vulgar of timeworn stratagems. Of a sudden the boarding of the floor sank beneath Kettle's feet. He turned, and with a

desperate effort tried to throw himself backward whence he had come. But the boarding behind reared up and hit him a violent blow on the hands and head, and he fell into a pit below.

For an instant he saw through the gloom the face of Rad el Moussa turned suddenly virulent, spitting at him in hate, and then the swing-floor slammed up into place again, and all view of anything but inky blackness was completely shut away.

Now the fall, besides being disconcerting, was tolerably deep; and but for the fact that the final blow from the flooring had shot him against the opposite side of the pit, and so broken his descent at the expense of his elbows and heels, he might very well have landed awkwardly, and broken a limb or his back in the process. But Captain Owen Kettle was not the man to waste time over useless lamentation or rubbing of bruises. He was on fire with fury at the way he had been tricked, and thirsting to get loose and be revenged. He had his pistol still in its proper pocket, and undamaged, and if the wily Rad had shown himself anywhere within range just then, it is a certain thing that he would have been shot dead to square the account.

But Kettle was, as I have said, wedged in with darkness, and for the present, revenge must wait until he could see the man he wanted to shoot at. He scrambled to his feet, and fumbled in his pocket for a match. He found one, struck it on the sole of his trim white shoe, and reconnoitred quickly.

The place he was in was round and bottle shaped, measuring some ten feet across its floor, and tapering to a small square, where the trap gave it entrance above. It was a prison clearly, and there was evidence that it had been recently used. It

was clear also that the only official way of releasing a prisoner was to get him up by a ladder or rope through the small opening to which the sides converged overhead. Moreover, to all common seeming, the place was simply unbreakable, at least to any creature who had not either wings or the power of crawling up the under-side of a slant like a fly.

But all these things flashed through Kettle's brain in far less time than it takes to read them here. He had only two matches in his possession, and he wished to make all possible use of the first, so as to keep the second for emergencies; and so he made his survey with the best of his intelligence and speed.

The walls of this bottle-shaped prison were of bricks built without visible mortar, and held together (it seemed probable) by the weight of earth pressing outside them; but just before the match burned his fingers and dropped to the floor, where it promptly expired, his eye fell upon an opening in the masonry. It was a mere slit, barely three inches wide, running vertically up and down for some six courses of the brick, and it was about chin-high above the ground.

He marked this when the light went out, and promptly went to it and explored it with his arm. The slit widened at the other side, and there was evidently a chamber beyond. He clapped his hands against the lip of the slit, and set his feet against the wall, and pulled with the utmost of his strength. If once he could widen the opening sufficiently to clamber through, possibilities lay beyond. But from the weight of wall pressing down above, he could not budge a single brick by so much as a hairs-breadth, and so he had to give up this idea,

and, stewing with rage, set about further reconnoitring.

The darkness put his eyes out of action, but he had still left his hands and feet, and he went round with these, exploring carefully.

Presently his search was rewarded. Opposite the opening he had discovered before, was another slit in the overhanging wall of this bottle-shaped prison, and this also he attacked in the hope of wrenching free some of the bricks. He strained and panted, till it seemed as though the tendons of his body must break, but the wall remained whole and the slit unpassable; and then he gave way, almost childishly, to his passion of rage, and shouted insults and threats at Rad el Moussa in the vain hope that some one would hear and carry them. And some one did hear, though not the persons he expected.

A voice, muffled and foggy, as though it came from a long distance, said in surprise: "Why, Captain, have they got you here, too?"

Under cover of the darkness, Kettle blushed for shame at his outcry. "That you, Murray? I didn't know you were here. How did you guess it was me?"

The distant voice chuckled foggily. "I've heard you giving your blessing to the hands on board, sir, once or twice, and I recognized some of the words. What have they collared you for? You don't photograph. Have you been messing round with some girl?"

"Curse your impudence; just you remember your position and mine. I'll have respect from my officers, even if I am in a bit of a fix."

"Beg pardon, sir. Sorry I forgot myself. It sha'n't occur again."

"You'll go to your room for three days when we get back on board."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"I decided that before I left the ship. I can't have my officers staying away from duty without leave on any excuse. And if they have such low tastes as to bring themselves on the level of common mop-headed portrait painters and photographers, they must pay for it."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"What were you run in for?"

"Oh, photographing."

"There you are, then! And did they bring you straight along here?"

"Yes, sir. And lowered me in a bowline to this cellar."

"Ah," said Kettle, "then you don't want so much change out of them. They dropped me, and some one will have a heavy bill to square up for, over that. Do you know whose house this is?"

"Haven't a notion. After I'd been here an hour or so, some heathen sneaked round to a peep-hole in the wall and offered to take off a message to the ship, on payment. I hadn't any money, so I had to give up my watch, and before I'd written half the letter he got interrupted and had to clear off with what there was. Did he bring off the message, sir?"

"He did. And I came ashore at once. You remember Rad el Moussa?"

"The man that consigned all that parcel of figs for London?"

"That man. I considered that as he'd been doing business with the steamer, he was the best person to make inquiries of ashore. So I came to him, and

asked where I could find the Kady to bail you out. He shuffled a bit, and after some talk he admitted he was the Kady, and took palm-oil from me in the usual way, and then I'll not deny that we had a trifle of a disagreement. But he seemed to simmer down all right, said he'd send along for you, and after a bit of time said you'd come, and wouldn't I walk through the house and see you myself. The crafty old fox had got his booby trap rigged in the mean time, and then I walked straight into it like the softest specimen of blame' fool you can imagine."

"Rad el Moussa," came the foggy comment. "By Jove! Captain, I believe we're in an awkward place. He's the biggest man in this town far and away, and about the biggest blackguard also from what I've heard. He's a merchant in every line that comes handy, from slaves and palm fibre to horses and dates; he runs most of those pearling dhows that we saw sweltering about at the anchorage; and he's got a little army of his own with which he raids the other coast towns and the caravans up-country when he hears they've got any truck worth looting. I say, this is scaring. I've been taking the thing pretty easily up to now, thinking it would come all right in time. But if I'd known it was old Rad who had grabbed me, I tell you I should have sat sweating."

"It takes a lot more than a mere nigger, with his head in clouts, to scare me," said Kettle truculently, "and I don't care tuppence what he may be by trade. He's got a down on me at present, I'll grant, but I'm going to give Mr. Rad el Moussa fits a little later on, and you may stand by and look on, if you aren't frightened to be near him."

"I'm not a funk in the open," grumbled Murray,

"and you know it. You've seen me handle a crew. But I'm in a kind of cellar here, and can't get out, and if anybody chooses they can drop bricks on me, and I can't stop them. Have they been at you about those rifles, sir?"

"What rifles? No, nobody's said 'rifles' to me ashore here."

"It seems we've got some cases of rifles on board for one of those little ports up the coast. I didn't know it."

"Nor did I," said Kettle, "and you can take it from me that we haven't. Smuggling rifles ashore is a big offence here in the Persian Gulf, and I'm not going to put myself in the way of the law, if I know it."

"Well, I think you're wrong, sir," said the Mate. "I believe they're in some cases that are down on the manifest as 'machinery.' I saw them stowed down No. 3 hold, and I remember one of the stevedores in London joking about them when they were struck below."

"Supposing they were rifles, what than?"

"Rad wants them. He says they're consigned to some of his neighbors up coast, who'll raid him as soon as they're properly armed; and he doesn't like the idea. What raiding's done, he likes to do himself, and at the same time he much prefers good Brummagen rifles to the local ironmonger's blunderbusses."

"Well," said Kettle, "I'm waiting to hear what he thought you could do with the rifles supposing they were on board."

"Oh, he expected me to broach cargo and bring them here ashore to him. He's a simple-minded savage."

"By James!" said Kettle, "the man's mad. What did he think I should be doing whilst one of my mates was scoffing cargo under my blessed nose?"

"Ah, you see," said the foggy voice, with sly malice, "he did not know you so well then, sir. That was before he persuaded you to come into his house to stay with him."

It is probable that Captain Kettle would have found occasion to make acid comment on this repartee from his inferior officer, but at that moment another voice addressed him from the slit at the other side of his prison, and he turned sharply round. To his surprise this new person spoke in very tolerable English.

"Capt'n, I want t'make contrack wid you."

"The deuce you do. And who might you be, anyway?"

"I cullud gen'lem'n, sar. Born Zanzibar. Used to be fireman on P. and O. I want arsk you——"

"Is this the Arabian Nights? How the mischief did you get here, anyway?"

"Went on burst in Aden, sar. Th'ole Chief fired me out. Went Yemen. Caught for slave. Taken caravan. Brought here. But I'm very clever gen'lem'n, sar, an' soon bought myself free. Got slave of my own now. An' three wives. Bought 'nother wife yesterday."

"You nasty beast!" said Kettle.

"Sar, you insult me. Not bally Christian any longer. Hard-shell Mohammedan now, sar, and can marry as many wives as I can buy."

"I'm sure the Prophet's welcome to you. Look here, my man. Pass down a rope's end from aloft there, and let me get on deck, and I'll give you a sovereign cash down, and a berth in my

steamboat's stoke-hold if you want one. I'm not asking you to help me more. I guess I'm quite competent to find my way on board, and to wipe this house tolerably clean before it's quit of me."

"Nothing of the kind, sar," said the man behind the slit. "You insult me, sar. I very big gen'lem'n here, sar, an' a sovereign's no use to me. Besides, I partner to ole man Rad, an' he say he want dem rifles you got on your ole tramp."

"Does he, indeed? Then you can tell him, Mr. Nigger runaway-drunken-fireman, that I'll see you and him in somewhere a big sight hotter than Arabia before he gets them. I didn't know they were rifles; if I had known before this, I'd not have put them ashore; but as things are now, I'll land them into the hands of those that ordered them, and I hope they come round to this town of yours and give you fits. And see here, you talk more respectful about my steamboat, or you'll get your shins kicked, daddy."

"An ole tramp," said the man relishingly. "I served on P. an' O., sar, an' on P. an' O. we don't care 'sociate wid tramps' sailors."

"You impudent black cannibal. You'll be one of the animals those passenger lines carry along to eat the dead babies, to save the trouble of heaving them overboard."

The ex-fireman spluttered. But he did not continue the contest. He recognized that he had to deal with a master in the cheerful art of insult, and so he came back sulkily to business.

"Will you give Rad dem rifles, you low white fellow?"

"No, I won't."

"Very well. Den we shall spiflicate you till you

do," said the man, and after that Kettle heard his slippers shuffling away.

"I wonder what spiflicating is?" mused Kettle, but he did not remain cudgelling his brain over this for long. It occurred to him that if this negro could come and go so handily to the outside of this underground prison, there must be a stairway somewhere near, and though he could not enlarge the slit to get at it that way, it might be possible to burrow a passage under the wall itself. For a tool, he had spied a broken crock lying on the floor, and with the idea once in his head, he was not long in putting it to practical effect. He squatted just underneath the slit, and began to quarry the earth at the foot of the wall with skill and determination.

But if Kettle was prompt, his captors were by no means dilatory. Between Kettle's prison and the mate's was another of those bottle-shaped *oubliettes*, and in that there was presently a bustle of movement. There came the noises of some one lighting a fire, and coughing as he fanned smouldering embers into a glow with his breath, and then more coughing and some curses as the fire-lighter took his departure. The door above clapped down into place, and then there was the sound of some one dragging over that and over the doors of the other two prisons what seemed to be carpets, or heavy rugs.

There was something mysterious in this manœuvre at first, but the secret of it was not kept for long. An acrid smell stole out into the air, which thickened every minute in intensity. Kettle seemed dimly to recognize it, but could not put a name to it definitely. Besides, he was working with all his might at scraping away the earth from the foot of the wall, and had little leisure to think of other things.

The heat was stifling, and the sweat dripped from him, but he toiled on with a savage glee at his success. The foundations had not been dug out; they were "floating" upon the earth surface; and the labor of undermining would, it appeared, be small.

But Murray in the other prison had smelt the reek before, and was able to put a name to it promptly. "By Jove! Captain," he shouted mistily from the distance, "they're going to smoke us to death; that's the game."

"Looks like trying it," panted the little sailor, from his work.

"That's dried camel's dung they're burning. There's no wood in Arabia here, and that's their only fuel. When the smoke gets into your lungs, it just tears you all to bits. I say, Skipper, can't you come to some agreement with Rad over those blessed rifles? It's a beastly death to die, this."

"You aren't dead—by a long chalk—yet. More'm I. I'd hate to be—smoke-dried like a ham—as bad as any Jew. But I don't start in—to scoff the cargo—on my own ship—at any bally price."

There was a sound of distant coughing, and then the misty question: "What are you working at?"

"Taking—exercise," Kettle gasped, and after that, communication between the two was limited to incessant staccato coughs.

More and more acrid grew the air as the burning camel's dung saturated it further and further with smoke, and more and more frenzied grew Kettle's efforts. Once he got up and stuffed his coat in the embrasure from which the smoke principally came. But that did little enough good. The wall was all chinks, and the bitter reek came in unchecked. He

felt that the hacking coughs were gnawing away his strength, and just now the utmost output of his thews was needed.

He had given up his original idea of mining a passage under the wall. Indeed, this would have been a labor of weeks with the poor broken crock which was his only tool, for the weight of the building above had turned the earth to something very near akin to the hardness of stone. But he had managed to scrape out a space underneath one brick, and found that it was loosened, and with trouble could be dislodged; and so he was burrowing away the earth from beneath others, to drop more bricks down from their places, and so make a gangway through the solid wall itself.

But simple though this may be in theory, it was tediously difficult work in practice. The bricks jammed even when they were undermined, and the wall was four bricks thick to its further side. Moreover, every alternate course was cross-pinned, and the workman was rapidly becoming asphyxiated by the terrible reek which came billowing in from the chamber beyond.

Still, with aching chest, and bleeding fingers, and smarting eyes, Kettle worked doggedly on, and at last got a hole made completely through. What lay in the blackness beyond he did not know; either Rad el Moussa or the fireman might be waiting to give him a *coup de grace* the moment his head appeared; but he was ready to accept every risk. He felt that if he stayed in the smoke of that burning camel's dung any longer he would be strangled.

The hole in the brickwork was scarcely bigger than a fox-earth, but he was a slightly built man, and with a hard struggle he managed to push his

way through. No one opposed him. He found and scraped his only remaining match, and saw that he was in another bottle-shaped chamber similar to the one he had left; but in this there was a doorway. There was pungent smoke reek here also, and, though its slenderness came to him as a blessed relief after what he had been enduring, he lusted desperately for a taste of the pure air outside.

The door gave to his touch, and he found a stair. He ran up this and stepped out into the corridor, where Rad had lured him to capture, and then, walking cautiously by the wall so as not to step into any more booby-traps, he came to the place where he calculated Murray would be jailed. A large thick carpet had been spread over the door so as to prevent any egress of the stinging smoke, or any ingress of air, and this he pulled away, and lifted the trap.

There was no sound from below. "Great heavens," he thought, "was the mate dead?" He hailed sharply, and a husky voice answered. Seeing nothing else at hand that would serve, he lowered an end of the carpet, keeping a grip on the other, and presently Murray got a hold and clambered up beside him.

In a dozen whispered words Kettle told his plans, and they were on the point of starting off to carry them out, when the *slop-slop* of slippers made itself heard advancing down the corridors. Promptly the pair of them sank into the shadows, and presently the ex-fireman came up whistling cheerfully an air from some English music-hall. He did not see them till they were almost within hand-grips, and then the tune froze upon his lips in a manner that was ludicrous.

But neither Kettle nor his mate had any eye for

the humors of the situation just then. Murray plucked the man's legs artistically from beneath him, and Kettle gripped his hands and throat. He thrust his savage little face close down to the black man's. "Now," he said, "where's Rad? Tell me truly, or I'll make you into dog's meat. And speak quietly. If you make a row, I'll gouge your eyes out."

"Rad, he in divan," the fellow stuttered in a scared whisper. "Sort o' front shop you savvy, sar. Don' kill me."

"I can recommend my late state-room," said Murray.

"Just the ticket," said Kettle. So into the *oubliette* they toppled him, clapping down the door in its place above. "There you may stay, you black beast," said his judge, "to stew in the smoke you raised yourself. If any of your numerous wives are sufficiently interested to get you out, they may do so. If not, you pig, you may stay and cure into bacon. I'm sure I sha'n't miss you. Come along, Mr. Mate."

They fell upon Rad el Moussa placidly resting among the cushions of the divan, with the stem of the water-pipe between his teeth, and his mind probably figuring out plans of campaign in which the captured rifles would do astonishing work.

Kettle had no revolver in open view, but Rad had already learned how handily that instrument could be produced on occasion, and had the wit to make no show of resistance. The sailor went up to him, delicately extracted the poignard from his sash, and broke the blade beneath his feet. Then he said to him, "Stand there," pointing to the middle of the floor, and seated himself on the divan in the attitude of a judge.

"Now, Mr. Rad el Moussa, I advise you to understand what's going to be said to you now, so that it'll be a lesson to you in the future.

"I came to you, not very long ago, asking for your card to the Kady. I told you my business was about the mate here, and you said you were Kady yourself. Whether you are or not I don't know, and I don't vastly care, but anyway, I paid for justice in hard money, and you said you'd give up the mate. You didn't do that. You played a trick on me, which I'll own up I was a fool to get caught by; and I make no doubt that you've been laughing at me behind my back with that nasty nigger partner of yours.

"Well, prisoner at the bar, let alone I'm a blooming Englishman—and Englishmen aren't sent into this world to be laughed at by any foreigners—I'm myself as well, and let me tell you I don't stand either being swindled out of justice when I've paid for it, or being played tricks on afterward. So you are hereby sentenced to the fine of one bag of pearls, to be paid on the spot, and furthermore to be incarcerated in one of those smoke boxes down the alleyway yonder till you can find your own way out. Now, prisoner, don't move during the next operation, or I'll shoot you. Mr. Mate, you'll find a small bag inside the top part of his nightgown, on the left-hand side. Got 'em?"

"Here they are, sir," said Murray.

"Thanks," said Kettle, and put the bag in his pocket. "And now, if you please, Mr. Mate, we'll just put His Whiskers into that cellar with the nigger, and leave him there to get smoked into a better and, we'll hope, a more penitent frame of mind."

They completed this pious act to their entire satisfaction, and left the house without further interruption. The townspeople were just beginning to move about again after the violence of the midday heat, but except for curious stares, they passed through the narrow streets between the whitewashed houses quite without interruption. And in due time they came to the beach, and hired a shore boat, which took them off to the steamer.

But here Kettle was not inclined to linger unnecessarily. He saw Grain, the second mate, and asked him how much more cargo there was to come off.

"The last lighter load is alongside this minute, sir."

"Then hustle it on deck as quick as you can, and then call the carpenter, and go forward and heave up."

Grain looked meaningly at Murray. "Am I to take the fore deck, sir."

"Yes, I appoint you acting mate for three days; and Mr. Murray goes to his room for that time for getting into trouble ashore. Now put some hurry into things, Mr. Grain; I don't want to stay here longer than's needful."

Grain went forward about his business, but Murray, who looked somewhat disconsolate, Kettle beckoned into the chart-house. He pulled out the pearl bag, and emptied its contents on to the chart table. "Now, look here, my lad," said he, "I have to send you to your room because I said I would, and because that's discipline; but you can pocket a thimblefull of these seed pearls just to patch up your wounded feelings, as your share of old Rad el Moussa's fine. They are only seed pearls, as I say, and aren't worth much. We were due to have more

as a sheer matter of justice, but it wasn't to be got. So we must make the best of what there is. You'll bag £20 out of your lot if you sell them in the right place ashore. I reckoned my damages at £500, and I guess I've got here about £200."

"Thank you, sir," said Murray. "But it's rather hard being sent to my room for a thing I could no more help than you could."

"Discipline, my lad. This will probably teach you to leave photographing to your inferiors in the future. There's no persuading me that it isn't that photograph box that's at the bottom of the whole mischief. Hullo, there's the windlass going already. I'll just lock up these pearls in the drawer, and then I must go on the bridge. *Er*, and about going to your room, my lad: as long as I don't see you for three days you can do much as you like. I don't want to be too hard. But as I said to old Rad el Moussa, justice is justice, and discipline's got to be kept."

"And what about the rifles, sir?"

Captain Kettle winked pleasantly. "I don't know that they are rifles. You see the cases are down on the manifest as 'machinery,' and I'm going to put them ashore as such; but I don't mind owning to you, Mr. Mate, that I hope old Rad finds out he was right in his information. I suppose his neighbors will let him know within the next week or so whether they are rifles really, or whether they aren't."

CHAPTER X

DAGO DIVERS

"I'm real glad to be able to call you 'Captain,' my lad," said Kettle, and Murray, in delight at his new promotion, wrung his old commander's hand again. "You've slaved hard enough as mate," Kettle went on, "though that's only what a man's got to do at sea nowadays if he wants promotion, and it'll probably amuse you to see Grain, who steps into your shoes, doing the work of four deck hands and an extra boatswain as well as his own. Grain was inclined to stoutness—he'll soon be thin again. As for you, you've sweated and slaved so much that your clothes hang on like you a slop-chest shirt on a stanchion just now. But you'll fill 'em out nicely by the time you get back to England again. Shouldn't wonder but what you turn out to be a regular fat man one of these days, my lad."

Murray stood back and looked humorously over Captain Kettle. The pair of them liked one another well, but the ties of discipline had kept them icily apart up to now. Murray's promotion put them on equal footing of grade now, and they were inclined to make the most of it for the short time they had together. "Running the *Parakeet* doesn't seem to have made you very plump, Skipper."

"Constitutional, I guess," said Kettle. "I don't believe the food's grown that'd make me carry flesh. I'm one of those men that was sent into the world

with a whole shipload of bad luck to work through before I came across any of the soft things."

"If you ask me," said Murray, cheerfully, "you haven't much to grumble at now. Here am I kicking you out of the command of the *Parakeet*, to be sure. And why? Because whilst you've been her old man you've made her pay about half what she originally cost per annum, and as out of that the firm's saved enough to build a new and bigger ship, they're naturally going to give her to you to scare up more fat dividends. Lord," said Murray, hitting his knee, "the chaps on board here will be calling me the 'old man' behind my back now."

"You'll get used to hearing the title," said Kettle grimly, "before you make your pile. You'll get married, I suppose, on the strength of the promotion? I saw a girl's photo nailed up in your room."

The new captain nodded. "Got engaged when I passed for my master's ticket. Arranged to be hitched so soon as I found a ship."

Kettle sighed drearily. "I was that way, my lad. I was married, and a kid had come before I was thirty. Not that I ever regretted it; by James! no. But for long enough I was never able to provide for the missus in the way I'd like, and I can tell you it was terrible gall to me to know that our set at the chapel looked down on her because she could only keep a poor home. Yes, my lad, you'll have a lot to go through."

"Well," said Murray, "I've got this promotion, and I'm not going to worry about dismals. I suppose you go straight home by mail from Aden here?"

"Hullo, haven't they told you?"

"My letter was only the dry, formal announce-

ment that you were promoted to the new ship, and I was to take over the *Parakeet*."

"They don't waste their typewriter in the office. I suppose they thought I'd hand on my letter if I saw fit. Read through that," said Kettle, and handed across his news. This is how it ran:—

BIRD, BIRD & CO.,
Ship and Insurance Brokers,
Agents to the Bird
Transport Company.
Managers of the
Bird Steam Company.

759, Euston Street,
LIVERPOOL,
21st March, 1896.

Swan,	375 tons.	Captain R. Evans.
Sparrow,	461 tons.	Captain James Evans.
s.s. *Starling*,	880 tons.	Captain Enoch Shaw.
s.s. *Parakeet*,	2,100 tons.	Captain Murray.
s.s. Building,	3,500 tons.	Captain O. Kettle.
s.s. Building,	3,500 tons.	Captain ——
s.s. Building,	4,000 tons.	Captain ——

"The superb vessels of the Bird Line!"

Dear Captain Kettle,—

Having noted from your cables and reports you are making a good thing for us out of tramping the "Parakeet," we have pleasure in transferring you to our new boat, which is now building on the Clyde. She will be 3,500 *tons, and we may take out passenger certificate, she being constructed on that specification. Your pay will be* £21 (*twenty-one pound*) *per month, with* 2½ *per cent. commission as before. But for the present, till this new boat is finished, we want you to give over command of the "Parakeet" to Murray, and take on a new job. Our Mr. Alexander Bird has recently bought the wreck of the s.s. "Grecian," and we are sending out a steamer with divers and full equipment to get the salvage. We wish you to go on board this ves-*

sel to watch over our interests. We give you full control, and have notified Captain Tazzuchi, at present in command, to this effect.

Yours truly,

p.p. Bird, Bird and Co.

To Captain O. Kettle, (*Isaac Bird.*)

s.s. "Parakeet," Bird Line, Aden.

"I see they have clapped me down on the bill heading for the *Parakeet* already," said Murray. "and you're shifted along in print for the new ship. Birds are getting on. But I've big doubts about three new boats all at one bite. One they might manage on a mortgage. But three? I don't think it. Old Ikey's too cautious."

"Messrs. Bird are your owners and mine," said Kettle significantly.

"Oh!" said the newly-made captain, "I'm not one of your old-fashioned sort that thinks an owner a little tin god."

"My view is," said Kettle, "that your owner pays you, and so is entitled to your respect so long as he is your owner. Besides that, whilst you are drawing pay, you're expected to carry out orders, whatever they may be, without question. But I don't think we'll talk any more about this, my lad. You're one of the newer school, I know, and you've got such a big notion of your own rights that we're not likely to agree. Besides, you've got to check my accounts and see I've left it all for you ship-shape, and I've to pull my bits of things together into a portmanteau. See you again before I go away, and we'll have a drop of whisky together to wish the *Parakeet*'s new 'old man' a pile of luck."

At the edge of the harbor, Aden baked under the sun, but Kettle was not the man to filch his employer's time for unnecessary strolls ashore. The salvage steamer rolled at her anchor at the opposite side of the harbor, and Kettle and two portmanteaux were transhipped direct in one of the *Parakeet's* boats.

He was received on board by an affable Italian, who introduced himself as Captain Tazzuchi. The man spoke perfect English, and was hospitality personified. The little salvage steamer was barely 300 tons burden, and her accommodation was limited, but Tazzuchi put the best room in the ship at his guest's disposal, and said that anything that could act for his comfort should be done forthwith.

"Y'know, Captain," said Tazzuchi, "this is what you call a 'Dago' ship, and we serve out country wine as a regular ration. But I thought perhaps you'd like your own home ways best, and so I've ordered the ship's chandler ashore to send off a case of Scotch, and another of Chicago beef. Oh yes, and I sent also for some London pickles. I know how you English like your pickles."

In fact, all that a man could do in the way of outward attention Tazzuchi did, but somehow or other Captain Kettle got a suspicion of him from the very first moment of their meeting. Perhaps it was to some extent because the British mariner has always an instinctive and special distrust for the Latin nations; perhaps it was because the civility was a little unexpected and over-effusive. Putting himself in the Italian's place, Kettle certainly would not have gone out of his way to be pleasant to a foreigner who was sent practically to supersede him in a command.

But perhaps a second letter which he had received, giving him a more intimate list of the duties required, had something to do with this hostile feeling. It was from the same hand which had written the firm's formal letter, but it was couched in quite a different vein. Isaac Bird was evidently scared for his very commercial existence, and he thrust out his arms to Kettle on paper as his only savior. It seemed that Alexander Bird, the younger brother, had been running a little wild of late.

The wreck of the *Grecian* had been put up for auction; Alexander strolled into the room by accident, and bought at an exorbitant figure. He came and announced his purchase to Isaac, declaring it as an instance of his fine business instincts. Isaac set it down to whisky, and recriminations followed. Alexander in a huff said he would go out and overlook the salvage operations in person. Isaac opined that the firm might scrape to windward of bankruptcy by that means, and advised Alexander to take remarkable pains about keeping sober. But forthwith Alexander, still in his cups, "and at a music hall, too, a place he knows 'Isaac's' religious connection holds in profound horror," gets to brawling, and is next discovered in hospital with a broken thigh.

"*I have found Alexander's department of the business very tangled,*" wrote Isaac, "*when I began to go into his books the first day he was laid up, and the thought of this new complication drove me near crazy. Salvage is out of our line; Alexander should never have touched it. But there it is; money paid, and I've had to borrow; and engaging that Italian firm for the job was the best thing I could manage. What English firms wanted was out of all reason.*

I don't wonder at Lloyds selling wrecks for anything they will fetch. A pittance in cash is better than getting into the hands of these sharks"(sharks was heavily underscored). "*And what guarantee have I that the firm will pocket even that pittance? How do I know that I shall see even the money outpaid again, let alone reasonable interest? None.*"

There were several words erased here, and the writer went on with what was evidently considered a dramatic finish. "'*But stay,' I say to myself, 'you have Kettle. He is down in the Red Sea now, doing well. You had all along intended to promote him. Do it now, and set him to overlook this Italian salvage firm whilst the new boat is building. He is the one to see that Isaac Bird's foot doth not fall, for Captain O. Kettle is a godly man also.*'"

The letter was shut off conventionally enough with the statement that the writer was Captain Kettle's truly, and ended in a post-scriptum tag to the effect that the envoy should still draw his two and a-half per cent. on net results. The actual figures had evidently not been conceded without a mental wrench, as the erasion beneath them showed, but there they stood in definite ink, and Kettle was not inclined to cavil at the process which deduced them.

However, although in his recent prosperity Kettle had assumed a hatred for risks, and bred a strong dislike for all those commercial adventures which lay beyond the ordinary rut and routine of trade, he took up his duties on the salvage steamer with a stout heart and cheerful estimate for the future. Ahead of him he had pleasant dreams of the big boat that was "building," and the increased monthly pay in store; and for the present, well, here was an owner's command, and of course that settled him

firmly in the berth. He had been too long an obedient slave to shipowners of every grade to have the least fancy for disputing the imperial will of Bird, Bird and Co.

Murray tooted his cheerful farewells on the *Parakeet's* siren as the little Italian salvage boat steamed out of the baking airs of Aden harbor, and ensigns were dipped with due formality. Tazzuchi was all hospitality. He invited Kettle to damage his palate with a black Italian "Virginia" cigar with a straw up the middle; he uncorked a bottle of the Scotch whisky with his own hand, splashed away the first wineglassful to get rid of the fusel oil, and put it ready for reference when his guest should feel athirst; and he produced a couple of American pirated editions of English novels to give even intellect its dainty feast.

Kettle accepted it all with a dry civility. He had every expectation of upsetting this man's plans of robbery later on, and very possibly of coming into personal contact with him. But the ties of bread and salt did not disturb him. Though it was Tazzuchi who presented the Virginias and the novels, he took it for granted that Messrs. Bird, Bird and Co. had paid for them, and he was not averse to accepting a little luxury from the firm. The economical Isaac had cut down the commissariat on the *Parakeet* till a man had to be half-starved before he could stomach a meal.

The salvage steamer had a South of Europe leisureliness in her movements. Her utmost pace was nine knots, but, as eight was more economical for coal consumption, it was at that speed she moved. The wreck of the *Grecian* was out of the usual steam lane. She had, it appeared, got off her course

in a fog, had run foul of a half-ebb reef which holed her in two compartments, and then been steered for the shore in the wild attempt to beach her before she sank. She had ceased floating, however, with some suddenness, and when the critical moment came not all of her people managed to scrape off with their lives in the boats. Those that stayed behind were incontinently drowned; those that got away found themselves in a gale (to which the fog gave place), and had so much trouble to keep afloat that they had no time left to make accurate determination of where their vessel sank; and when they were picked up could only give her whereabouts vaguely. However, they stated that the *Grecian*'s mast-trucks remained above the water surface, and by these she could be found; and this fact was brought out strongly by the auctioneer who sold the wreck, and had due influence on the enterprising Alexander. "Masts!" said Alexander, who daily saw them bristling from a dock, "don't tell me you can miss masts anywhere."

But, as it chanced, it was only by a fluke that the salvage steamer stumbled across the wreck at all. She wandered for several days among an intensely dangerous archipelago, and many times over had narrow escapes from piling up her bones on one or other of those reefs with which the Red Sea in that quarter abounds. Tazzuchi navigated her in an ecstasy of nervousness, and Kettle (who regarded himself as a passenger for the time being) kept a private store of food and water-bottles handy, and saw that one of the quarter-boats was ready for hurried lowering. But nowhere did they see those mast-trucks. They did not sight so much as a scrap of floating wreckage.

There seemed, however, a good many dhow coasters dodging about in and among the reefs, and from these Kettle presently drew a deduction.

"Look here," he said to Tazzuchi one morning, "what price those gentry ashore having found the wreck already? I guess they aren't out here taking week-end trippers for sixpenny yachting cruises."

"No," said Tazzuchi, "and they aren't fishing; you can see that."

"Well, I give you the tip for what it's worth," said Kettle; and that afternoon the steamer was run up alongside a dhow, which tried desperately to escape. Her captain was dragged on board, and at that juncture Captain Kettle took upon himself to go below. He knew what would probably take place, and, though he disapproved of such methods strongly, he felt he could not interfere. He was in Bird, Bird and Co.'s employ, and what was being done would forward the firm's interest.

But presently came a noise of bellowing from the deck above, and then that was followed by shrill screams as the upper gamut of agony was reached. Kettle was prepared for rough handling, but at information gained by absolute torture he drew the line. It was clear that these cruel beggars of Italians were going too far.

"By James!" he muttered to himself, "owners or no owners, I can't stand this," and started hurriedly to go back to the deck. But before he reached the head of the companion-way the cries of pain ceased, and so he stood where he was on the stair, and waited. The engines rumbled, and the steamer once more gathered way. A clamor of barbaric voices reached him, which gradually died into quietude. It was clear they were leaving the dhow behind.

Captain Kettle drew a long breath. They would stick at little, these Dagos, in getting the salvage of the *Grecian*, and it seemed preposterous to suppose that once they gripped the specie in their own fingers they would ever give it up for the paltry pay which had been offered by Bird, Bird and Co. Their own poverty was aching. He saw it whenever he looked about the patched little steamer. He felt it whenever he sat down to one of their painfully frugal meals.

Still, though no man knew more bitterly than Kettle himself from past experience what poverty meant, and how it cut, the poverty of these Italians was no concern of his just then. They were paid servants of the owners exactly as he was, and it was his duty to see that they earned their hire. He took it that he was one against the whole ship's company, but the odds did not daunt him. On the contrary, something of his old fighting spirit, which had been of late hustled into the background by snug commercial prosperity, came back to him. And besides, he had always at his call that exquisite pride of race which has so many times given victory to the Anglo-Saxon over the Latin, when all reasonable balances should have made it go the other way.

By a sort of instinct he buttoned up his trim white drill coat, and stepped out on deck. There would be no scuffle yet awhile. With the specie that would make the temptation still snugly stored on the sea-floor, the dirty, untidy Italians were still all affability. Indeed, as soon as he appeared, Tazzuchi himself stepped down off the upper bridge to give him the news.

"How do you think those crafty imps have man-

aged it?" he cried, with a gesture. "Why they dived down and cut off her masts below water level. The funnel was out of sight already. They just thought they were going to have the skimming of that wreck themselves. No wonder we couldn't pick her up."

"Cute beggars," said Kettle.

"I've bagged a pilot. If he takes us there straight, he gets backsheesh. If he doesn't, he eats more stick. I think," said Captain Tazzuchi, with a wide smile, "that he'll take us there the quickest road."

"Shouldn't wonder," said Kettle. "But don't be surprised if his friends come round and make things ugly. When those Red Sea niggers get their fingers in a wreck, they think's it's their wreck."

"Let them come. We were ready for this sort of entertainment when we sailed, and there are plenty of rifles and cartridges in the cabin. If there is any trouble, we shall shoot; and if we begin that game, we shall just imagine they are Abyssinians, and shoot to kill. The Italians have a big bill to pay with those jokers, anyway." He tapped Kettle on the shoulder. "And look at those two brass signal guns, Captain. If we break up some firebars for shot, they'll smash the side of any dhow in the Red Sea."

Under the black captive's guidance, the salvage steamer soon put a term to her search. For two more hours she threaded her way among surf which broke over unseen reefs, and swung round the capes of a rocky archipelago, and then the pilot gave his word and the engines were stopped and a rusty cable roared out till an anchor got its hold of the ground. A boat was lowered with air-pump already stepped amidships, and the boat's crew

with eager hands assisted the diver to make his toilet.

"You chaps seem keen enough," said Kettle, as he watched the trail of air bubbles which showed the man's progress on the sea floor below.

"They have each got a stake in the venture."

"I bet they have," was Kettle's grim comment to himself.

The kidnapped skipper of the dhow, it seemed, had done his pilotage with a fine accuracy. The salvage steamer had been anchored in a good position, and between them two divers in two boats found the *Grecian's* wreck in half an hour. Indeed, they had made their first descent practically within hand-touch of her, but the water was full of a milky clay and very opaque, and sight below the surface was consequently limited.

They came up to the air for a quarter of an hour's spell and made their announcement, and then the copper helmets were clapped into place again, and once more like a pair of uncouth sea monsters they slowly and clumsily faded away into the depths. A gabble of excited Italian kept pace to the turning of the air-pumps, and of that language Kettle knew barely a score of words. Practically these people might have weaved any kind of plot noisily and under his very nose without his being any the wiser, and this possibility did little to quell his suspicions.

But still Tazzuchi was all outward frankness. "It's as well we brought out this little steamboat just to skim the wreck and survey her," he said. "If they'd waited to fit out a big salvage expedition. to raise her straight off, I reckon there wouldn't have been much left but iron plates and coal

bunkers. These Red Sea niggers are pretty useful at looting, once they start. The beggars can dive pretty nearly as well and as long in their naked skins as their betters can in a proper diving suit."

Each time the divers came up from the opaque white water they brought more reports. Binnacles, whistle, wheels, and all movable deck fittings were gone already. The chart-house had been looted down to the bare boards. Hatches were off, both forward and aft, and already the cargo had begun to diminish. The black men of the district had been making good use of their time; and as the probabilities were that they would return in force to glean from this store which they considered legally theirs, it was advisable to collect as much as possible into the salvage steamer before any disturbances began.

News came from the cool mysterious water to the baking region of air above, almost at the second hour of the search, that the *Grecian* could never be refloated. In addition to the holes already made in two of her compartments, she had settled on a sharp jag of rock, which had pierced her in a third place aft. But at the same time this one piece of rock was the only solid spot in the neighborhood. All the rest of the sea floor was paved with pulpy white clay, and in this the unfortunate wreck had settled till already it was flush with her lower decks. There were evidences, too, that the ooze was creeping higher every day, so that all that remained was to strip her as quickly as might be before she was swallowed up for always.

Tazzuchi asked Captain Kettle for his opinion that night in the chart-house. "I'm to be guided by you, of course," he said, "but my idea is that

we should go for the specie first thing, and let everything slide till that's snugly on board here. Birds gave £5,400 for the wreck, and there's £8,000 in cash down there in a room they built specially for it over the shaft-tunnel. If we can grab that, it will pay our expenses and commission and all the other actual outlay, and Birds will be out of the wood. Afterward, if we can weigh any more of the cargo, well, that will be all clear profit."

"Yes," thought Kettle, "you want those gold boxes in your hands, you blessed Dago, and then you'll begin to play your monkey tricks. I wonder if you think you're going to jam a knife into me by way of making things snug and safe?" But aloud he expressed agreement to Captain Tazzuchi's plan.

He felt that this was diplomacy, and though the diplomatic art was new and strange to him, he told himself that it was the correct weapon to use under the circumstances. He had risen out of his old grade of hole-and-corner shipmaster, where it had been his province to carry things through by rough blows and violent words. He was a Captain in a regular line—the Bird line—now, and (with a trifle of a sigh) he remembered that wild fights and scrimmages were beneath the dignity of his position.

Accordingly, as soon as dawn gave a waking light, the boats were put out again, and the divers were given orders to let the further survey of the vessel rest, and put all their efforts into getting the specie boxes on to the end of the salvage steamer's winch chain. They were quickly helmed and sent below, and presently an increased cloudiness in the water told him that they were actively at work. A lot of dhows were showing here and there amongst the

reefs, obviously watching them, and Tazzuchi was beginning to get nervous.

"We're in for trouble, I'm afraid," he said to Kettle. "That rock on which she's settled astern has made a hole in her you could drive a cart through. I suppose it was a tight-fitting hole at first, but as she settled more and moved about, it's got enlarged same as the hole in a tin of beef does when you begin to waggle it with the can-opener."

"Well?"

"Didn't you hear the report they've just sung off from the boats? Oh, I forgot, you don't understand Italian. Well, the news is that the rock's acted as a can-opener to such fine effect that it's split a hole in the bottom of the strong room, and those gold boxes have toppled through."

"And buried themselves in the slime?"

"That's it. And Lord knows how many feet they've sunk. It's dreadful stuff to dig amongst—slides in on you as soon as you start to dig, and levels up. They'll have to brattice as they work. It'll be a big job."

All that day Kettle watched the sea with an anxious eye. In the two boats men ground at the air-pumps under the aching sunlight. From below the mud came up in white billows, which danced, and swirled, and eddied as the air bubbles from the divers' exhaust valves stirred it. And out beyond, in and among the reefs, and along the distant shore, which swung and shimmered in the heat haze, hungry dhows prowled like carrion birds temporarily driven away from a prey.

Tazzuchi and the chief engineer busied themselves in binding together fragments of fire-bars with iron wire. The Italian shipmaster had a great notion of

the damage his signal-guns could do against a dhow, if they were provided with orthodox solid shot. As a point of fact they never came into action. As soon as the second night came down, and the darkness became fairly fixed in hue, there began to crackle out of the distance a desultory rifle fire from every quarter of the compass. It was not very heavy—at the outside there were not a score of weapons firing, and it could not be called accurate since not one bullet in twenty so much as hit the steamer; but it was annoying for all that, and as the marksmen and their vessels were completely swallowed up by the blackness of the night, it was impossible to repay their compliments in kind.

Morning showed the damage of one port window smashed, two panes gone from the engine-room skylight, and the air-pump in one of the boats alongside with a plunger neatly cut into two pieces. But there was a spare air-pump in store, and after dawn came, work went on as usual. The dhows came no nearer, neither did they go much further away. They pottered about just beyond rifle shot, and their numbers were slightly increased. Tazzuchi, full of enthusiasm for his artillery, tried a carefully aimed shot at one of the largest. But the explosion was quite outdone in noise by the cackle of laughter which followed it. So slow was the flight of the missile that the eye could trace it. So short was its journey, and so curved its trajectory, that it came very near to hitting one of the boats of the divers, and the men working there cried out in derision that they would catch cold by being wetted by the spray.

'Well," thought Kettle, "these are pretty cool

hands for Dagos, anyway. I'm going to have a fine tough time of it when my part of the scuffle comes."

That night he had a still further taste of their quality. So soon as darkness fell, the dhows closed in again and recommenced their sniping. They kept under weigh, and so it did little enough good to aim back at the flashes. But Tazzuchi, with half a dozen keen spirits, got down into one of the boats with their rifles and knives, and a drum of paraffin, and pulled away silently into the blackness.

There was silence for quite half an hour, and the suspense on the anchored steamer was vivid enough to have shaken trained men. Yet these Italian artificers and merchant seamen seemed to take it as coolly as though such sorties were an everyday occurrence. But at the end of that time there was a splutter of shots, a few faint squeals, and then a bonfire lighted up away in the darkness.

The blaze grew rapidly, and showed in its heart the outline of a dhow with human figures on it. With promptness every man on the steamer emptied his rifle at the mark, and continued the fusillade till the dhow was deserted. They had all done their spell of military service, and they chose to decide that these snipers were Abyssinians, and did their best toward squaring the national accounts.

Tazzuchi and his friends returned in the boat, safe and jubilant, and for the rest of that night the little salvage steamer was left in quietude. With the next daybreak the divers and their attendants once more applied themselves to labor. Kettle, as he watched, was amazed to see the energy they put into it. Certainly they seemed keen enough to get the specie weighed, and on board. Whatever pirati-

cal plans they had got made up were evidently for afterward.

But when day after day passed, and still none of the treasure was brought to the surface, he began to modify this original opinion. Tazzuchi—translating the divers' reports—said that the cause of the delay was the softness of the sea-floor. The heavy chests had sunk deep into the ooze, and directly a spadeful of the horrible slime was dug away, more slid in to fill the gap. Of course this might be true; but there was only Tazzuchi's word for it. The sea was too consistently opaque to give one a chance of seeing down from above the surface.

Now as suspicion had got so deep a hold on Captain Kettle's mind, he began to cudgel his brain for some new method by which the Italians could serve their purpose. He put himself supposititiously in Tazzuchi's place, and made piratical theories by the score. Most of them he had to dismiss after examination as impracticable, others he eliminated by natural selection; and finally one stood out as practicable beyond all the rest.

For one thing it did not want many participants; only the actual divers and Tazzuchi himself. For another, it would not brand the whole gang of them as criminals and pirates, but (properly managed) would make them rich without any advertised stigma or stain. In simple words, the method was this: the gold boxes must be removed from their original site, and hidden elsewhere under the water close at hand. The friendly slime would bury them snugly out of sight. The old report of "un-get-at-able" would be adhered to, and finally the steamer would give up further salvage operations as hopeless (after fishing up some useless cargo out of the holds

as a conscience salve) and steam away to port. There Tazzuchi and his friends would either desert or get themselves dismissed, charter a small vessel of their own, and go back for the plunder; and with £8,000 in clear hard cash to divide, live prosperously (from an Italian standpoint) ever afterward.

Kettle felt an unimaginative man's complacency in ferreting out such a dramatic scheme, and began to think next upon the somewhat important detail of how to get proofs before he commenced to frustrate it. Chance seemed to make Tazzuchi play into his hand. The air-pump which had been damaged by the rifle bullet had been mended by the steamer's engineers, and as there were two or three spare diving dresses on the ship, Captain Tazzuchi expressed his intention of making a descent in person to inspect progress.

"I didn't do it before, because I didn't want to make the men break time, but I can go down now without interrupting their work. Will you come off in the boat with me, Captain, and hand my life-line?"

"I'll borrow one of those spare dresses and share the pump with you," said Kettle.

Tazzuchi was visibly startled. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that the pump will give air for two, and I'm coming down with you."

"But you know nothing about diving, and you might have an accident, and I should be responsible."

"Oh, I'll risk that! You must nursery-maid me a bit."

Tazzuchi lowered his voice. "To tell the truth, I'm going to pay a surprise visit. I want to make sure those chaps below are doing the square thing.

If they aren't, and I catch them, there'll be a row, and they'll use their knives."

"H'm!" said Kettle, "I've got no use for your local weapon as a general thing. I find a gun handiest. But at a pinch like this I'll borrow a knife of you, and if it comes to any one cutting my air-tube you'll find I can use it pretty mischievously."

"I wish you wouldn't insist upon this," said Tazzuchi persuasively.

"I'm going to, anyway."

"I'm going down merely because it's my duty."

"That's the very same reason that's taking me, Captain. I must ask you not to make any more objections. I'm a man that never changes his mind, once it's made up."

Whereupon Tazzuchi shrugged his shoulders, and gave way.

"Now," thought Kettle to himself, "that man's made up his mind to kill me if he gets the glimmer of a chance, and, as I'm not going to get wiped out this journey, he'll do with a lot of watching."

It has been the present writer's business at one time and another to point out that Captain Owen Kettle is a man of iron nerve; but I cannot call to mind any instance where his indomitable courage was more severely tried than in this voluntary descent in the diving dress. The world beneath the waters was strange and dangerous to him; his companion was a man against whom he held the blackest suspicion; the men at the pump (whose language he did not understand) might any moment cut off his supply, and leave him to drown like a puppy under a bucket. The circumstances combined were enough to daunt a Bayard.

But Kettle felt that the men in the boat, who helped to adjust his stiff rubber dress, were regarding him with more than ordinary curiosity, and, for his own pride's sake, he preserved an unruffled face. He even tried a rude jest in their own tongue before they made fast the helmet on his head, and the cackle of their laughter was the last sound he heard before the metal dome closed the audible world away from him.

They hung the weights over his chest and back, and Tazzuchi signed to him to descend. Kettle hitched round the sheath-knife to the front of his belt, and signed with politeness, "After you."

Tazzuchi did not argue the matter. He lifted his clumsy lead-soled feet over the side of the boat, got on the ladder, and climbed down out of sight. Kettle followed. The chill of the water crept up and closed over his head; the steady throb-throb of the air-pump beat against his skull; and a little shiver took him in one small spot between the shoulder blades, because he knew that it was there that an Italian, if he can manage it, always plants a knife in his enemy.

He reached the end of the ladder and slid down a rope. He felt curiously corky and insecure, but still when he reached the bottom he sank up to his knees in impalpable mud. He could foggily see Tazzuchi a few paces away waiting for him, and he went up to him at once. If the men in the boat, acting on orders, cut his air-tube, he wanted to be in a position to cut Captain Tazzuchi's also with promptness.

However, everything went peacefully just then. The Italian set off down a track in the slime, and Kettle waded laboriously after him. It was terrible

work making a passage through that white glutinous ooze, but they came to the wreck directly, and, working round her rusty flank, stood beside a great shallow pit, where two weird-looking gray sea-monsters showed in dim outline through the dense fog of the water.

Sound does not carry down there in that quiet world, and the two new-comers stood for long enough before the two workers observed them. But one chanced to look up and see them watching and jogged the other with his spade, and then both frantically beckoned the visitors to come down into the pit. Tazzuchi led, and Kettle followed, wallowing down the slopes of slime, and there at the bottom, in the dim, milky light, one of the professional divers slipped a shovel into his hand and thrust it downward, till it jarred against something solid underfoot.

It was clear they had come upon the gold boxes, and they wished to impress upon the visitors, in underwater dumb show, that the find had only been made that very minute. It was a strange enough performance. Half-seen hands snapped red fingers in triumph. Ponderously booted feet did a dance of ecstasy in three feet of gluey mud. And meanwhile, Kettle, with a hand on the haft of his knife, edged away from this uncanny demonstration, lest some one should slit his air-tube before he could prevent it.

He had seen what he wanted; he had no reason to wait longer; and besides, being a novice at diving, his lungs were half burst already in the effort to get breath, and his head was singing like a tea-urn. The gold boxes were there, and if they were not brought to the surface, and carried hon-

estly to Suez, the matter would have to be fought out above in God's open air, and not in that horrible choking quagmire of slime and cruel water. And so, still guarding himself cannily, he got back again to the boat, and almost had it in him to shake hands with the men who eased him of that intolerable helmet.

Now far be it from me to raise even a suspicion that Captain Owen Kettle resented the fact that he had been robbed of a scuffle when the little salvage steamer actually did bring up in Suez harbor with the specie honestly locked in one of her staterooms. But that he was violently angry he admits himself without qualification. He says he kicked himself for being such a bad judge of men.

The *Parakeet* was in when they arrived, rebunkering for the run home, and Murray came off as fast as a crew could drive his boat to inquire the news.

He saw Tazzuchi on the deck and accosted him with a vigorous handshake, and a "Hullo, Fizzhookey, old man, how goes it? Who'd have thought of seeing you here? Howdy, Captain Kettle. Had good fishing?"

"Do you know Captain Tazzuchi?"

"Somewhat. Why, we were both boys on the *Conway* together."

"You're making some mistake. Captain Tazzuchi is an Italian."

"Oh, am I?" said Tazzuchi. "Not much of the Dago about me except the name."

"Well, you never told me that before."

"You never asked me, that I know of. I speak about enough of the lingo to carry on duty with, and I serve on an Italian ship because I couldn't get a skipper's billet on anything else. But I'm as

English as either of you, and as English as Birds—or more English than Birds, seeing that they come from somewhere near Jerusalem. Great Scot, Captain Kettle, can't you tell a Dago yet for sure? Where have you been all your days?"

Murray laughed. "Well, come across and discuss it in the *Parakeet*. I've got a case of champagne on board to wet my new ticket."

"Stay half a minute," said Tazzuchi, "we'll just get those boxes of gold down into your boat, Murray, and ferry them across. I sha'n't be sorry to have them out of my responsibility. They're too big a temptation to leave handy for the crew there is on board here."

"Phew!" said Kettle, "it's hot here in Suez. Great James! to think of the way I've been sweating about this blame' ship without a scrap of need of it. Here, hurry up with the lucre-boxes. I want to get across to the old *Parakeet* and wash the taste of a lot of things out of my mouth."

CHAPTER XI

THE DEAR INSURED.

"He isn't the 'dear deceased' yet by a very long chalk," said Captain Kettle.

"If he was," retorted Lupton with a dry smile, "my immediate interest in him would cease, and the Company would shrug its shoulders, and pay, and look pleasant. In the mean while he's, shall we say, 'the dear insured,' and a premium paying asset that the Company's told me off to keep an eye on."

"Do much business in your particular line?"

'Why yes, recently a good deal. It's got to be quite a fashionable industry of late to pick up some foolish young gentleman with expectations, insure his life for a big pile, knock him quietly on the head, and then come back home in a neat black suit to pocket the proceeds."

"Does this Mr. —" Kettle referred to the passenger list—"Hamilton's the rogue's name, isn't it?"

"No, he's the flat. Cranze is the—er—his friend who stands to draw the stamps."

"Does Mr. Hamilton know you?"

"Never seen me in his life."

"Does this thief Cranze?"

"Same."

"Then, sir, I'll tell you what's your ticket," said Kettle, who had got an eye to business. "Take a passage with me out to the Gulf and back, and keep an eye on the young gentleman yourself. You'll find

it a bit cold in the Western Ocean at first, but once we get well in the Gulf Stream, and down toward New Orleans, I tell you you'll just enjoy life. It'll be a nice trip for you, and I'm sure I'll do my best to make things comfortable for you."

"I'm sure you would, Captain, but it can't be done at the price."

Kettle looked thoughtfully at the passenger list. "I could promise you a room to yourself. We're not very full up this run. In fact, Mr. Hamilton and Mr. Cranze are the only two names I've got down so far, and I may as well tell you we're not likely to have others. You see Birds are a very good line, but they lay themselves out more for cargo than passengers."

"So our local agent in Liverpool found out for us already, and that's mostly why I'm here. Don't you see, Captain, if the pair of them had started off to go tripping round the Mexican Gulf in one of the regular passenger boats, there would have been nothing suspicious about that. But when they book berths by you, why then it begins to look fishy at once."

Kettle turned on his companion with a sudden viciousness. "By James!" he snapped, "you better take care of your words, or there'll be a man in this smoke-room with a broken jaw. I allow no one to sling slights at either me or my ship. No, nor at the firm either that owns both of us. You needn't look round at the young lady behind the bar. She can't hear what we're saying across in this corner, and if even she could she's quite welcome to know how I think about the matter. By James, do you think you can speak to me as if I was a common railway director? I can tell you that, as

Captain of a passenger boat, I've a very different social position."

"My dear sir," said Lupton soothingly, "to insult you was the last thing in my mind. I quite know you've got a fine ship, and a new ship, and a ship to be congratulated on. I've seen her. In fact I was on board and all over her only this morning. But what I meant to point out was (although I seem to have put it clumsily) that Messrs. Bird have chosen to schedule you for the lesser frequented Gulf ports, finding, as you hint, that cargo pays them better than passengers."

"Well?"

"And naturally therefore anything that was done on the *Flamingo* would not have the same fierce light of publicity on it that would get on—say—one of the Royal Mail boats. You see they bustle about between busy ports crammed with passengers who are just at their wits' end for something to do. You know what a pack of passengers are. Give them a topic like this: Young man with expectations suddenly knocked overboard, nobody knows by whom; 'nother young man on boat drawing a heavy insurance from him; and they aren't long in putting two and two together."

"You seem to think it requires a pretty poor brain to run a steam-packet," said Kettle contemptuously. "How long would I be before I had that joker in irons?"

"If he did it as openly as I have said, you'd arrest him at once. But you must remember Cranze will have been thinking out his game for perhaps a year beforehand, till he can see absolutely no flaw in it, till he thinks, in fact, there's not the vaguest chance of being dropped on. If anything happens to Hamil-

ton, his dear friend Cranze will be the last man to be suspected of it. And mark you, he's a clever chap. It isn't your clumsy, ignorant knave who turns insurance robber—and incidentally murderer."

"Still, I don't see how he'd be better off on my ship than he would be on the bigger passenger packets."

"Just because you won't have a crowd of passengers. Captain, a ship's like a woman; any breath of scandal damages her reputation, whether it's true and deserved or not. And a ship-captain's like a woman's husband; he'll put up with a lot to keep any trace of scandal away from her."

"That's the holy truth."

"A skipper on one of the bigger passenger lines would be just as keen as you could be not to have his ship mixed up with anything discreditable. But passengers are an impious lot. They are just bursting for want of a job, most of them; they revel in anything like an accident to break the monotony; and if they can spot a bit of foul play—or say they helped to spot it—why, there they are, supplied with one good solid never-stale yarn for all the rest of their natural lives. So you see they've every inducement to do a lot of ferreting that a ship's officers (with other work on hand) would not dream about."

Captain Kettle pulled thoughtfully at his neat red pointed beard. "You're putting the thing in a new light, sir, and I thank you for what you've said. I see my course plain before me. So soon as we have dropped the pilot, I shall go straight to this Mr. Cranze, and tell him that from information received I hear he's going to put Mr. Hamilton over

the side. And then I shall say: 'Into irons you go, my man, so soon as ever Hamilton's missing.'"

Lupton laughed rather angrily. "And what would be the result of that, do you think?"

"Cranze will get mad. He'll probably talk a good deal, and that I shall allow within limits. But he'll not hit me. I'm not the kind of a man that other people see fit to raise their hands to."

"You don't look it. But, my good sir, don't you see that if you speak out like that, you'll probably scare the beggar off his game altogether?"

"And why not? Do you think my ship's a blessed detective novel that's to be run just for your amusement?"

Lupton tapped the table slowly with his fingers. "Now look here, Captain," he said, "there's a chance here of our putting a stop to a murderous game that's been going on too long, by catching a rogue red-handed. It's to our interest to get a conviction and make an example. It's to your interest to keep your ship free from a fuss."

"All the way."

"Quite so. My Company's prepared to buy your interest up."

"You must put it plainer than that."

"I'll put it as definitely as you like. I'll give you £20 to keep your eye on these men, and say nothing about what I've told you, but just watch. If you catch Cranze so clearly trying it on that the Courts give a conviction, the Company will pay you £200."

"It's a lot of money."

"My Company will find it a lot cheaper than paying out £20,000, and that's what Hamilton's insured for."

"Phew! I didn't know we were dealing with

such big figures. Well, Mr. Cranze has got his inducements to murder the man, anyway."

"I told you that from the first. Now, Captain, are you going to take my check for that preliminary £20?"

"Hand it over," said Kettle. "I see no objections. And you may as well give me a bit of a letter about the balance."

"I'll do both," said Lupton, and took out his stylograph, and called a waiter to bring him hotel writing paper.

Now Captain Owen Kettle, once he had taken up this piece of employment, entered into it with a kind of chastened joy. The Life Insurance Company's agent had rather sneered at ship-captains as a class (so he considered), and though the man did his best to be outwardly civil, it was plain that he considered a mob of passengers the intellectual superiors of any master mariner. So Kettle intended to prove himself the "complete detective" out of sheer *esprit de corps*.

As he had surmised, Messrs. Hamilton and Cranze remained the *Flamingo's* only two passengers, and so he considered he might devote full attention to them without being remarkable. If he had been a steward making sure of his tips he could not have been more solicitous for their welfare; and to say he watched them like a cat is putting the thing feebly. Any man with an uneasy conscience must have grasped from the very first that the plot had been guessed at, and that this awkward little skipper, with his oppressive civilities, was merely waiting his chance to act as Nemesis.

But either Mr. Cranze had an easy mind, and

Lupton had unjustly maligned him, or he was a fellow of the most brazen assurance. He refused to take the least vestige of a warning. He came on board with a dozen cases of champagne and four of liqueur brandy as a part of his personal luggage, and his first question to every official he came across was how much he would have to pay per bottle for corkage.

As he made these inquiries from a donkey-man, two deck hands, three mates, a trimmer, the third engineer, two stewards, and Captain Kettle himself, the answers he received were various, and some of them were profane. He seemed to take a delight in advertising his chronic drunkenness, and betweenwhiles he made a silly show of the fact that he carried a loaded revolver in his hip pocket. "Lots fellows do't now," he explained. "Never know who-you-may-meet. S' a mos' useful habit."

Now Captain Kettle, in his inmost heart, considered that Cranze was nerving himself up with drink to the committal of his horrid deed, and so he took a very natural precaution. Before they had dropped the Irish coast he had managed to borrow the revolver, unbeknown to its owner, and carefully extracted the powder from the cartridges, replacing the bullets for the sake of appearances. And as it happened, the chief engineer, who was a married man as well as a humorist, though working independently of his skipper, carried the matter still further. He, too, got hold of the weapon, and brazed up the breech-block immovably, so that it could not be surreptitiously reloaded. He said that his wife had instructed him to take no chances, and that meanwhile, as a fool's pendant, the revolver was as good as ever it had been.

The revolver became the joke of the ship. Cranze kept up a steady soak on king's peg—putting in a good three fingers of the liqueur brandy before filling up the tumbler with champagne—and was naturally inclined to be argumentative. Any one of the ship's company who happened to be near him with a little time to spare would get up a discussion on any matter that came to his mind, work things gently to a climax, and then contradict Cranze flatly. Upon which, out would come the revolver, and down would go the humorist on his knees, pitifully begging for pardon and life, to the vast amusement of the onlookers.

Pratt, the chief engineer, was the inventor of this game, but he openly renounced all patent rights. He said that everybody on board ought to take the stage in turn—he himself was quite content to retire on his early laurels. So all hands took pains to contradict Cranze and to cower with a fine show of dramatic fright before his spiked revolver.

All the *Flamingo*'s company except one man, that is. Frivolity of this sort in no way suited the appetite of Captain Owen Kettle. He talked with Cranze with a certain dry cordiality. And at times he contradicted him. In fact the little sailor contradicted most passengers if he talked to them for long. He was a man with strong opinions, and he regarded tolerance as mere weakness. Moreover, Cranze's chronic soaking nauseated him. But at the same time, if his civility was scant, Cranze never lugged out the foolish weapon in his presence. There was a something in the shipmaster's eye which daunted him. The utmost height to which his resentment could reach with Captain Kettle was a folding of the arms and a scowl which was intended

to be majestic, but which was frequently spoiled by a hiccough.

In pleasant contrast to this weak, contemptible knave was the man Hamilton, his dupe and prospective victim. For him Kettle formed a liking at once, though for the first days of the voyage it was little enough he saw of his actual presence. Hamilton was a bad sailor and a lover of warmth, and as the Western Ocean was just then in one of its cold and noisy moods, this passenger went shudderingly out of the cabin when meals came on, and returned shudderingly from the cold on deck as soon they were over.

But when the *Flamingo* began to make her southing, and the yellow tangles of weed floating in emerald waves bore evidence that they were steaming against the warm current of the Gulf Stream, then Hamilton came into view. He found a spot on the top of the fiddley under the lee of a tank where a chair could stand, and sat there in the glow of sun and boilers, and basked complacently.

He was a shy, nervous little man, and though Kettle had usually a fine contempt for all weakness, somehow his heart went out to this retiring passenger almost at first sight. Myself, I am inclined to think it was because he knew him to be hunted, knew him to be the object of a murderous conspiracy, and loathed most thoroughly the vulgar rogue who was his treacherous enemy. But Captain Kettle scouts the idea that he was stirred by any such feeble, womanish motives. Kettle was a poet himself, and with the kinship of species he felt the poetic fire glowing out from the person of this Mr. Hamilton. At least, so he says; and if he has deceived himself on the matter, which, from an out-

sider's point of view, seems likely, I am sure the error is quite unconscious. The little sailor may have his faults, as the index of these pages has shown; but untruthfulness has never been set down to his tally, and I am not going to accuse him of it now.

Still, it is a sure thing that talk on the subject of verse making did not come at once. Kettle was immensely sensitive about his accomplishment, and had writhed under brutal scoffs and polished ridicule at his poetry more times than he cared to count. With passengers especially he kept it scrupulously in the background, even as he did his talent for making sweet music on the accordion.

But somehow he and Hamilton, after a few days' acquaintance, seemed to glide into the subject imperceptibly. Mutual confidences followed in the course of nature. It seemed that Hamilton too, like Kettle, was a devotee of the stiller forms of verse.

"You see, Skipper," he said, "I've been a pretty bad lot, and I've made things hum most of my time, and so I suppose I get my hankerings after restfulness as the natural result of contrast."

"Same here, sir. Ashore I can respect myself, and in our chapel circle, though I say it myself, you'll find few more respected men. But at sea I shouldn't like to tell you what I've done; I shouldn't like to tell any one. If a saint has to come down and skipper the brutes we have to ship as sailor-men nowadays, he'd wear out his halo flinging it at them. And when matters have been worst, and I've been bashing the hands about, or doing things to carry out an owner's order that I'd blush even to think of ashore, why then, sir, gentle verse, to

tunes I know, seems to bubble up inside me like springs in a barren land."

"Well, I don't know about that," said Hamilton doubtfully, "but when I get thoroughly sick of myself, and wish I was dead, I sometimes stave off putting a shot through my silly head by getting a pencil and paper, and shifting my thoughts out of the beastly world I know, into——well, it's hard to explain. But I get sort of notions, don't you see, and they seem to run best in verse. I write 'em when the fit's on me, and I burn 'em when the fit's through; and you'll hardly think it, but I never told a living soul I ever did such a thing till I told you this minute. My set—I mean, I couldn't bear to be laughed at. But you seem to be a fellow that's been in much the same sort of box yourself."

"I don't know quite that. At any rate, I've never thought of shooting myself."

"Oh, I didn't mean to suggest we were alike at all in detail. I was only thinking we had both seen rough times. Lord forbid that any man should ever be half the fool that I have been." He sighed heavily.—"However, sufficient for the day. Look out over yonder; there's a bit of color for you."

A shoal of flying-fish got up out of the warm, shining water and ran away over the ripples like so many silver rats; yellow tangles of Gulf-weed swam in close squadron on the emerald sea; and on the western horizon screw-pile lighthouses stood up out of the water, marking the nearness of the low-lying Floridan beaches, and reminding one of mysterious Everglades beyond.

"A man, they tell me," said Hamilton, "can go into that country at the back there, and be a hermit, and live honestly on his own fish and fruit.

I believe I'd like that life. I could go there, and be decent, and perhaps in time I should forget things."

"Don't you try it. The mosquitoes are shocking."

"There are worse devils than mosquitoes. Now I should have thought there was something about those Everglades that would have appealed to you, Skipper?"

"There isn't, and I've been there. You want a shot-gun in Florida to shoot callers with, not eatables. I've written verse there, and good verse, but it was the same old tale, sir, that brought it up to my fingers' ends. I'd been having trouble just then—yes, bad trouble. No, Mr. Hamilton, you go home, sir, to England and find a country place, and get on a farm, and watch the corn growing, and hear the birds sing, and get hold of the smells of the fields, and the colors of the trees, and then you'll enjoy life and turn out poetry you can be proud of."

"Doesn't appeal to me. You see you look upon the country with a countryman's eye."

"Me," said Kettle. "I'm seaport and sea bred and brought up, and all I know of fields and a farm is what I've seen from a railway-carriage window. No, I've had to work too hard for my living, and for a living for Mrs. Kettle and the youngsters, to have any time for that sort of enjoyment; but a man can't help knowing what he wants, sir, can he? And that's what I'm aiming at, and it's for that I'm scratching together every sixpence of money I can lay hands on."

But here a sudden outcry below broke in upon their talk. "That's Mr. Cranze," said Kettle. "He'll be going too far in one of his tantrums one of these days."

"I'm piously hoping the drunken brute will tumble overboard," Hamilton muttered; "it would save a lot of trouble for everybody. Eh, well," he said, "I suppose I'd better go and look after him," and got up and went below.

Captain Kettle sat where he was, musing. He had no fear that Cranze, the ship's butt and drunkard, would murder his man in broad, staring daylight, especially as, judging from the sounds, others of the ship's company were at present baiting him. But he did not see his way to earning that extra £200, which he would very much like to have fingered. To let this vulgar, drunken ruffian commit some overt act against Hamilton's life, without doing him actual damage, seemed an impossibility. He had taken far to great a fancy for Hamilton to allow him to be hurt. He was beginning to be mystified by the whole thing. The case was by no means so simple and straightforward as it had looked when Lupton put it to him in the hotel smoking-room ashore.

Had Cranze been any other passenger, he would have stopped his drunken riotings by taking away the drink, and by giving strict orders that the man was to be supplied with no further intoxicants. But Cranze sober might be dangerous, while Cranze tipsy was merely a figure of ridicule; so he submitted, very much against his grain, to having his ship made into a bear-garden, and anxiously awaited developments.

The *Flamingo* cleared the south of Florida, sighted the high land of Cuba, and stood across through the Yucatan channel to commence her peddling business in Honduras, and at some twenty ports she came to an anchor six miles off shore, and hooted

with her siren till lighters came off through the surf and the shallows.

Machinery they sent ashore at these little-known stations, coal, powder, dress-goods, and pianos, receiving in return a varied assortment of hides, mahogany, dyewoods, and some parcels of ore. There was a small ferrying business done also between neighboring ports in unclean native passengers, who harbored on the foredeck, and complained of want of deference from the crew.

Hamilton appeared to extract some melancholy pleasure from it all, and Cranze remained unvaryingly drunk. Cranze passed insults to casual strangers who came on board and did not know his little ways, and the casual strangers (after the custom of their happy country) tried to knife him, but were always knocked over in the nick of time, by some member of the *Flamingo's* crew. Hamilton said there was a special providence which looks after drunkards of Cranze's type, and declined to interfere; and Cranze said he refused to be chided by a qualified teetotaller, and mixed himself further king's pegs.

Messrs. Bird, Bird and Co., being of an economical turn of mind, did not fall into the error of overmanning their ships, and so as one of the mates chose to be knocked over by six months' old malarial fever, Captain Kettle had practically to do a mate's duty as well as his own. A mate in the mercantile marine is officially an officer and some fraction of a gentleman, but on tramp steamers and liners where cargo is of more account than passengers—even when they dine at half-past six, instead of at midday—a mate has to perform manual labors rather harder than that accomplished by any three regular deck hands.

I do not intend to imply that Kettle actually drove a winch, or acted as stevedore below, or sweated over bales as they swung up through a hatch, but he did work as gangway man, and serve at the tally desk, and oversee generally while the crew worked cargo; and his watch over the passengers was at this period of necessity relaxed. He tried hard to interest Hamilton in the mysteries of hold stowage, in order to keep him under his immediate eye. But Hamilton bluntly confessed to loathing anything that was at all useful, and so he perforce had to be left to pick his own position under the awnings, there to doze, and smoke cigarettes, and scribble on paper as the moods so seized him.

It was off one of the ports in the peninsula of Yucatan, toward the Bay of Campeachy, that Cranze chose to fall overboard. The name of the place was announced by some one when they brought up, and Cranze asked where it was. Kettle marked it off with a leg of the dividers on the chart. "Yucatan," said Cranze, "that's the ruined cities shop, isn't it?"——He shaded his unsteady eyes, and looked out at a clump of squalid huts just showing on the beach beyond some three miles of tumbling surf. "Gum! here's a ruined city all hot and waiting. Home of the ancient Aztecs, and colony of the Atlanteans, and all that. Skipper, I shall go ashore, and enlarge my mind."

"You can go if you like," said Kettle, "but remember, I steam away from here as soon as ever I get the cargo out of her, and I wait for no man. And mind not to get us upset in the surf going there. The water round here swarms with sharks, and I shouldn't like any of them to get indigestion."

"Seem trying to make yourself jolly ob—bub—jectiable's morning," grumbled Cranze, and invited Hamilton to accompany him on shore forthwith. "Let's go and see the girls. Ruined cities should have ruined girls and ruined pubs to give us some ruined amusement. We been on this steamer too long, an' we want variety. V'riety's charming. Come along and see ruined v'riety."

Hamilton shrugged his shoulders. "Drunk as usual, are you? You silly owl, whatever ruined cities there may be, are a good fifty miles in the bush."

" 'S all you know about it. I can see handsome majestic ruin over there on the beach, an' I'm going to see it 'out further delay. 'S a duty I owe to myself to enlarge the mind by studying the great monuments of the past."

"If you go ashore, you'll be marooned as safe as houses, and Lord knows when the next steamer will call. The place reeks of fever, and as your present state of health is distinctly rocky, you'll catch it, and be dead and out of the way inside a week easily. Look here, don't be an ass."

"Look here yourself. Are you a competent medicated practitioner?"

"Oh, go and get sober."

"Answer me. Are you competent medicated practitioner?"

"No, I'm not."

"Very well then. Don't you presume t'lecture me on state of my health. No reply, please. I don' wan' to be encumbered with your further acquaintance. I wish you a go' morning."

Hamilton looked at Captain Kettle under his brows. "Will you advise me," he said, "what I ought to do."

"I should say it would be healthier for you to let him have his own way."

"Thanks," said Hamilton, and turned away. "I'll act on that advice."

Now the next few movements of Mr. Cranze are wrapped in a certain degree of mystery. He worried a very busy third mate, and got tripped on the hard deck for his pains; he was ejected forcibly from the engineers' mess-room, where it was supposed he had designs on the whisky; and he was rescued by the carpenter from an irate half-breed Mosquito Indian, who seemed to have reasons for desiring his blood there and then on the spot. But how else he passed the time, and as to how he got over the side and into the water, there is no evidence to show.

There were theories that he had been put there by violence as a just act of retribution; there was an idea that he was trying to get into a lighter which lay alongside for a cast ashore, but saw two lighters, and got into the one which didn't exist; and there were other theories also, but they were mostly frivolous. But the very undoubted fact remained that he was there in the water, that there was an ugly sea running, that he couldn't swim, and that the place bristled with sharks.

A couple of lifebuoys, one after the other, hit him accurately on the head, and the lighter cast off, and backed down to try and pick him up. He did not bring his head on to the surface again, but stuck up an occasional hand, and grasped with it frantically. And, meanwhile, there was great industry among the black triangular dorsal fins that advertised the movements of the sharks which owned them underneath the surface. Nobody on board

the *Flamingo* had any particular love for Cranze, but all hands crowded to the rail and shivered and felt sick at the thought of seeing him gobbled up.

Then out of the middle of these spectators jumped the mild, delicate Hamilton, with a volley of bad language at his own foolishness, and lit on a nice sleek wave-crest, feet first in an explosion of spray. Away scurried the converging sharks' fins, and down shot Hamilton out of sight.

What followed came quickly. Kettle, with a tremendous flying leap, landed somehow on the deck of the lighter, with bones unbroken. He cast a bowline on to the end of the main sheet, and, watching his chance, hove the bight of it cleverly into Hamilton's grasp, and as Hamilton had come up with Cranze frenziedly clutching him round the neck, Kettle was able to draw his catch toward the lighter's side without further delay.

By this time the men who had gone below for that purpose had returned with a good supply of coal, and a heavy fusillade of the black lumps kept the sharks at a distance, at any rate for the moment. Kettle heaved in smartly, and eager hands gripped the pair as they swirled up alongside, and there they were on the lighter's deck, spitting, dripping, and gasping. But here came an unexpected developement. As soon as he had got back his wind, the mild Hamilton turned on his fellow passenger like a very fury, hitting, kicking, swearing, and almost gnashing with his teeth; and Cranze, stricken to a sudden soberness by his ducking, collected himself after the first surprise, and returned the blows with a murderous interest.

But one of the mates, who had followed his cap-

OUT OF THE MIDDLE OF THESE SPECTATORS JUMPED THE MILD, DELICATE HAMILTON.

[*Page* 278.

tain down on to the lighter to bear a hand, took a quick method of stopping the scuffle. He picked up a cargo-sling, slipped it round Cranze's waist, hooked on the winch-chain, and passed the word to the deck above. Somebody alive to the jest turned on steam, and of a sudden Cranze was plucked aloft, and hung there under the derrick-sheave, struggling impotently, like some insane jumping-jack.

Amid the yells of laughter which followed, Hamilton laughed also, but rather hysterically. Kettle put a hand kindly on his wet shoulder. "Come on board again," he said. "If you lie down in your room for an hour or so, you'll be all right again then. You're a bit over-done. I shouldn't like you to make a fool of yourself."

"Make a fool of myself," was the bitter reply. "I've made a bigger fool of myself in the last three minutes than any other man could manage in a life-time."

"I'll get you the Royal Humane Society's medal for that bit of a job, anyway."

"Give me a nice rope to hang myself with," said Hamilton ungraciously, "that would be more to the point. Here, for the Lord's sake let me be, or I shall go mad." He brushed aside all help, clambered up the steamer's high black side again, and went down to his room.

"That's the worst of these poetic natures," Kettle mused as he, too, got out of the lighter; "they're so highly strung."

Cranze, on being lowered down to deck again, and finding his tormentors too many to be retaliated upon, went below and changed, and then came up again and found solace in more king's pegs. He was not specially thankful to Hamilton for saving

his life; said, in fact, that it was his plain duty to render such trifling assistance; and further stated that if Hamilton found his way over the side, he, Cranze, would not stir a finger to pull him back again.

He was very much annoyed at what he termed Hamilton's "unwarrantable attack," and still further annoyed at his journey up to the derrick's sheave in the cargo-sling, which he also laid to Hamilton's door. When any of the ship's company had a minute or so to spare, they came and gave Cranze good advice and spoke to him of his own unlovableness, and Cranze hurled brimstone back at them unceasingly, for king's peg in quantity always helped his vocabulary of swear-words.

Meanwhile the *Flamingo* steamed up and dropped cargo wherever it was consigned, and she abased herself to gather fresh cargo wherever any cargo offered. It was Captain Kettle who did the abasing, and he did not like the job at all; but he remembered that Birds paid him specifically for this among other things; and also that if he did not secure the cargo, some one else would steam along, and eat dirt, and snap it up; and so he pocketed his pride (and his commission) and did his duty. He called to mind that he was not the only man in the world who earned a living out of uncongenial employment. The creed of the South Shields chapel made a point of this: it preached that to every man, according to his strength, is the cross dealt out which he has to bear. And Captain Owen Kettle could not help being conscious of his own vast lustiness.

But one morning, before the *Flamingo* had finished with her calls on the ports of the Texan

rivers, a matter happened on board of her which stirred the pulse of her being to a very different gait. The steward who brought Captain Kettle's early coffee coughed, and evidently wanted an invitation to speak.

"Well?' said Kettle.

"It's about Mr. Hamilton, sir. I can't find 'im anywheres."

"Have you searched the ship?"

"Hunofficially, sir."

"Well, get the other two stewards, and do it thoroughly."

The steward went out, and Captain Kettle lifted the coffee cup and drank a salutation to the dead. From that very moment he had a certain foreboding that the worst had happened. "Here's luck, my lad, wherever you now may be. That brute Cranze has got to windward of the pair of us, and your insurance money's due this minute. I only sent that steward to search the ship for form's sake. There was the link of poetry between you and me, lad; and that's closer than most people could guess at; and I know, as sure as if your ghost stood here to tell me, that you've gone. How, I've got to find out."

He put down the cup, and went to the bathroom for his morning's tub. "I'm to blame, I know," he mused on, "for not taking better care of you, and I'm not trying to excuse myself. You were so brimful of poetry that you hadn't room left for any thought of your own skin, like a chap such as I am is bound to have. Besides, you've been well-off all your time and you haven't learned to be suspicious. Well, what's done's done, and it can't be helped. But, my lad, I want you to look

on while I hand in the bill. It'll do you good to see Cranze pay up the account."

Kettle went through his careful toilet, and then in his spruce white drill went out and walked briskly up and down the hurricane deck till the steward came with the report. His forebodings had not led him astray. Hamilton was not on board: the certain alternative was that he lay somewhere in the warm Gulf water astern, as a helpless dead body.

"Tell the Chief Officer," he said, "to get a pair of irons out of store and bring them down to Mr. Cranze's room. I'm going there now."

He found Cranze doctoring a very painful head with the early application of stimulant, and Cranze asked him what the devil he meant by not knocking at the door before opening it.

Captain Kettle whipped the tumbler out of the passenger's shaking fingers, and emptied its contents into the wash-basin.

"I'm going to see you hanged shortly, you drunken beast," he said, "but in the mean while you may as well get sober for a change, and explain things up a bit."

Cranze swung his legs out of the bunk and sat up. He was feeling very tottery, and the painfulness of his head did not improve his temper. "Look here," he said, "I've had enough of your airs and graces. I've paid for my passage on this rubbishy old water-pusher of yours, and I'll trouble you to keep a civil tongue in your head, or I'll report you to your owners. You are like a railway guard, my man. After you have seen that your passengers have got their proper tickets, it's your duty to——"

Mr. Cranze's connective remarks broke off here for the time being. He found himself suddenly plucked away from the bunk by a pair of iron hands, and hustled out through the state-room door. He was a tall man, and the hands thrust him from below, upward, and, though he struggled wildly and madly, all his efforts to have his own way were futile. Captain Owen Kettle had handled far too many really strong men in this fashion to even lose breath over a dram-drinking passenger. So Cranze found himself hurtled out on to the lower fore-deck, where somebody handcuffed him neatly to an iron stanchion, and presently a mariner, by Captain Kettle's orders, rigged a hose, and mounted on the iron bulwark above him, and let a three-inch stream of chilly brine slop steadily on to his head.

The situation, from an onlooker's point of view, was probably ludicrous enough, but what daunted the patient was that nobody seemed to take it as a joke. There were a dozen men of the crew who had drawn near to watch, and yesterday all these would have laughed contemptuously at each of his contortions. But now they are all stricken to a sudden solemnity.

"Spell-o," ordered Kettle. "Let's see if he's sober yet."

The man on the bulwarks let the stream from the hose flop overboard, where it ran out into a stream of bubbles which joined the wake.

Cranze gasped back his breath, and used it in a torrent of curses.

"Play on him again," said Kettle, and selected a good black before-breakfast cigar from his pocket. He lit it with care. The man on the bulwark shifted his shoulder for a better hold against the

derrick-guy, and swung the limp hose in-board again. The water splashed down heavily on Cranze's head and shoulders, and the onlookers took stock of him without a trace of emotion. They had most of them seen the remedy applied to inebriates before, and so they watched Cranze make his gradual recovery with the eyes of experts.

"Spell-o," ordered Kettle some five minutes later, and once more the hose vomited sea water ungracefully into the sea. This time Cranze had the sense to hold his tongue till he was spoken to. He was very white about the face, except for his nose, which was red, and his eye had brightened up considerably. He was quite sober, and quite able to weigh any words that were dealt out to him.

"Now," said Kettle judicially, "what have you done with Mr. Hamilton?"

"Nothing."

"You deny all knowledge of how he got overboard?"

Cranze was visibly startled. "Of course I do. Is he overboard?"

"He can't be found on this ship. Therefore he is over the side. Therefore you put him there."

Cranze was still more startled. But he kept himself in hand. "Look here," he said, "what rot! What should I know about the fellow? I haven't seen him since last night."

"So you say. But I don't see why I should believe you. In fact, I don't."

"Well, you can suit yourself about that, but it's true enough. Why in the name of mischief should I want to meddle with the poor beggar? If you're thinking of the bit of a scrap we had yesterday, I'll own I was full at the time. And so must he have

been. At least I don't know why else he should have set upon me like he did. At any rate that's not a thing a man would want to murder him for."

"No, I should say £20,000 is more in your line."

"What are you driving at?"

"You know quite well. You got that poor fellow insured just before this trip, you got him to make a will in your favor, and now you've committed a dirty, clumsy murder just to finger the dollars."

Cranze broke into uncanny hysterical laughter. "That chap insured; that chap make a will in my favor? Why, he hadn't a penny. It was me that paid for his passage. I'd been on the tear a bit, and the Jew fellow I went to about raising the wind did say something about insuring, I know, and made me sign a lot of law papers. They made out I was in such a chippy state of health that they'd not let me have any more money unless I came on some beastly dull sea voyage to recruit a bit, and one of the conditions was that one of the boys was to come along too and look after me."

"You'll look pretty foolish when you tell that thin tale to a jury."

"Then let me put something else on to the back of it. I'm not Cranze at all. I'm Hamilton. I've been in the papers a good deal just recently, because I'd been flinging my money around, and I didn't want to get stared at on board here. So Cranze and I swapped names, just to confuse people. It seems to have worked very well."

"Yes," said Kettle, "it's worked so well that I don't think you'll get a jury to believe that either. As you don't seem inclined to make a clean breast of it, you can now retire to your room, and be

restored to your personal comforts. I can't hand you over to the police without inconvenience to myself till we get to New Orleans, so I shall keep you in irons till we reach there. Steward—where's a steward? Ah, here you are. See this man is kept in his room, and see he has no more liquor. I make you responsible for him."

"Yes, sir," said the steward.

Continuously the dividends of Bird, Bird and Co. outweighed every other consideration, and the *Flamingo* dodged on with her halting voyage. At the first place he put in at, Kettle sent off an extravagant cablegram of recent happenings to the representative of the Insurance Company in England. It was not the cotton season, and the Texan ports yielded the steamer little, but she had a ton or so of cargo for almost every one of them, and she delivered it with neatness, and clamored for cargo in return. She was "working up a connection." She swung round the Gulf till she came to where logs borne by the Mississippi stick out from the white sand, and she wasted a little time, and steamed past the nearest outlet of the delta, because Captain Kettle did not personally know its pilotage. He was getting a very safe and cautious navigator in these latter days of his prosperity.

So she made for the Port Eads pass, picked up a pilot from the station by the lighthouse, and steamed cautiously up to the quarantine station, dodging the sandbars. Her one remaining passenger had passed from an active nuisance to a close and unheard prisoner, and his presence was almost forgotten by every one on board, except Kettle and the steward who looked after him. The merchant seaman of these latter days has to pay such a

strict attention to business, that he has no time whatever for extraneous musings.

The *Flamingo* got a clean bill from the doctor at the quarantine station, and emerged triumphantly from the cluster of craft doing penance, and, with a fresh pilot, steamed on up the yellow river, past the white sugar-mills, and the heavy cypresses behind the banks. And in due time the pilot brought her up to New Orleans, and, with his glasses on the bridge, Kettle saw his acquaintance, Mr. Lupton, waiting for him on the levee.

He got his steamer berthed in the crowded tier, and Mr. Lupton pushed on board over the first gang-plank. But Kettle waved the man aside till he saw his vessel finally moored. And then he took him into the chart-house and shut the door.

"You seem to have got my cable," he said. "It was a very expensive one, but I thought the occasion needed it."

His visitor tapped Kettle confidentially on the knee. "You'll find my office will deal most liberally with you, Captain. But I can tell you I'm pretty excited to hear your full yarn."

"I'm afraid you won't like it," said Kettle. "The man's obviously dead, and, fancy it or not, I don't see how your office can avoid paying the full amount. However, here's the way I've logged it down"—and he went off into detailed narration.

The New Orleans heat smote upon the chart-house roof, and the air outside clattered with the talk of negroes. Already hatches were off, and the winch chains sang as they struck out cargo, and from the levee alongside, and from New Orleans below and beyond, came tangles of smells which are peculiarly their own. A steward brought in tea, and it stood

on the chart-table untasted, and at last Kettle finished, and Lupton put a question.

"It's easy to tell," he said, "if they did swap names. What was the man that went overboard like?"

"Little dark fellow, short sighted. He was a poet, too."

"That's not Hamilton, anyway, but it might be Cranze. Is your prisoner tall?"

"Tall and puffy. Red-haired and a spotty face."

"That's Hamilton, all the way. By Jove! Skipper, we've saved our bacon. His yarn's quite true. They did change names. Hamilton's a rich young ass that's been painting England red these last three years."

"But, tell me, what did the little chap go overboard for?"

"Got there himself. Uneasy conscience, I suppose. He seems to have been a poor sort of assassin anyway. Why, when that drunken fool tumbled overboard amongst the sharks, he didn't leave him to be eaten or drowned, is more than I can understand. He'd have got his money as easy as picking it up off the floor, if he'd only had the sense to keep quiet."

"If you ask me," said Kettle, "it was sheer nobility of character. I had a good deal of talk with that young gentleman, sir. He was a splendid fellow. He had a true poetical soul."

Mr. Lupton winked sceptically. "He managed to play the part of a thorough-paced young blackguard at home pretty successfully. He was warned off the turf. He was kicked out of his club for card-sharping. He was——well, he's dead now, anyway, and we won't say any more about him, except that he's

been stone-broke these last three years, and has been living on his wits and helping to fleece other flats. But he was only the tool, anyway. There is a bigger and more capable scoundrel at the back of it all, and, thanks to the scare you seem to have rubbed into that spotty-faced young mug you've got locked up down below, I think we can get the principal by the heels very nicely this journey. If you don't mind, I'll go and see this latest victim now, before he's had time to get rid of his fright."

Captain Kettle showed his visitor courteously down to the temporary jail, and then returned to the chart-house and sipped his tea.

"His name may really have been Cranze, but he was a poet, poor lad," he mused, thinking of the dead. "That's why he couldn't do the dirty work. But I sha'n't tell Lupton that reason. He'd only laugh—and—that poetry ought to be a bit of a secret between the lad and me. Poor, poor fellow! I think I'll be able to write a few lines about him myself after I've been ashore to see the agent, just as a bit of an epitaph. As to this spotty-faced waster who swapped names with him, I almost have it in me to wish we'd left him to be chopped by those sharks. He'd his money to his credit anyway—and what's money compared with poetry?"

CHAPTER XII

THE FIRE AND THE FARM

The quartermaster knocked smartly, and came into the chart-house, and Captain Kettle's eyes snapped open from deep sleep to complete wakefulness.

"There's some sort of vessel on fire, sir, to loo'ard, about five miles off."

The shipmaster glanced up at the tell-tale compass above his head. "Officer of the watch has changed the course, I see. We're heading for it, eh?"

"Yes, sir. The second mate told me to say so."

"Quite right. Pass the word for the carpenter, and tell him to get port and starboard lifeboats ready for lowering in case they're wanted. I'll be on the bridge in a minute."

"Aye, aye, sir," said the quartermaster, and withdrew into the darkness outside.

Captain Owen Kettle's toilet was not of long duration. Like most master mariners who do business along those crowded steam lanes of the Western Ocean, he slept in most of his clothes when at sea as a regular habit, and in fact only stripped completely for the few moments which were occupied by his morning's tub. If needful, he could always go out on deck at a second's notice, and be ready to remain there for twenty-four hours. But in this instance there was no immediate hurry, and so he spent a full minute and a half over his toilet, and emerged with washed hands and face,

sprucely brushed hair and beard, and his person attired in high rubber thigh-boots and leather-bound black oilskins.

The night was black and thick with a drizzle of rain, and a heavy breeze snored through the *Flamingo's* scanty rigging. The second mate on the bridge was beating his fingerless woollen gloves against his ribs as a cure for cold fingers. The first mate and the third had already turned out, and were on the boatskids helping the carpenter with the housings, and overhauling davit falls. On that part of the horizon against which the *Flamingo's* bows sawed with great sweeping dives was a streaky, flickering yellow glow.

Kettle went on to an end of the bridge and peered ahead through the bridge binoculars. "A steamer," he commented, "and a big one too; and she's finely ablaze. Not much help we shall be able to give. It will be a case of taking off the crew, if they aren't already cooked before we get there." He looked over the side at the eddy of water that clung to the ship's flank. "I see you're shoving her along," he said to the second mate.

"I sent word down to the engine-room to give her all they knew the moment we raised the glow. I thought you wouldn't grudge the coal, sir."

"No, quite right. Hope there aren't too many of them to be picked off, or we shall make a tight fit on board here."

"Funny we should be carrying the biggest cargo the old boat's ever had packed into her. But we shall find room to house a few poor old sailormen. They won't mind much where they stow, as long as they're picked up out of the wet. B-r-r-rh!" shivered the second mate, "I shouldn't much fancy

open-boat cruising in the Western Ocean this weather."

Captain Kettle stared on through the shiny brass binoculars. "Call all hands," he said quietly. "That's a big ship ahead of us, and she'll carry a lot of people. God send she's only an old tramp. At those lifeboats there!" he shouted. "Swing the davits outboard, and pass your painters forward. Hump yourselves, now."

"There's a lot of ice here, sir," came a grumbling voice out of the darkness, "and the boats are frozen on to the chocks. We've got to hammer it away before they'll hoist. The falls are that froze, too, that they'll not render——"

"You call yourself a mate and hold a master's ticket, and want to get a ship of your own!"—Kettle vaulted over the rail on to the top of the fiddley, and made for his second in command. "Here, my man, if your delicate fingers can't do this bit of a job, give me that marlinspike. By James! do you hear me? Give up the marlinspike. Did you never see a boat iced up before? Now then, carpenter. Are you worth your salt? Or am I to clear both ends in this boat by myself?"

So, by example and tongue, Captain Kettle got his boats swung outboard, and the *Flamingo*, with her engines working at an unusual strain, surged rapidly nearer and nearer to the blaze.

On shore a house on fire at any hour draws a crowd. At sea, in the bleak cold wastes of the water desert, even one other shipload of sympathizers is too often wished for vainly. Wind, cold, and breakdowns of machinery the sailor accepts with dull indifference; shipwrecks, strandings, and disease he looks forward to as part of an inevita-

ble fate; but fire goes nearer to cowing him than all other disasters put together; and the sight of his fellow-seamen attacked by these same desolating flames arouses in him the warmest of his sympathy, and the full of his resourcefulness. Moreover, in Kettle's case, he had known the feel of a ship afire under his own feet, and so he could appreciate all the better the agony of these others.

But meanwhile, as the *Flamingo* made her way up wind against the charging seas, a fear was beginning to grip the little shipmaster by the heart that was deep enough to cause him a physical nausea. The burning steamer ahead grew every minute more clear as they raced toward her. She was on fire forward, and she lay almost head-on toward them, keeping her stern to the seas, so that the wind would have no help in driving the flames aft, and making her more uninhabitable.

From a distance it had been hard to make out anything beyond great stacks of yellow flame, topped by inky, oily smoke, which drove in thick columns down the wind. As they drew nearer, and her size became more apparent, some one guessed her as a big cargo tramp from New Orleans with cotton that had overheated and fired, and Kettle took comfort from the suggestion and tried to believe that it might come true.

But as they closed with her, and came within earshot of her syren, which was sending frightened useless blares across the churning waters, there was no being blind to the true facts any longer. This was no cargo boat, but a passenger liner; outward bound, too, and populous. And as they came still nearer, they saw her after-decks black and wriggling with people, and Kettle got a glimpse of her structure and recognized the vessel herself.

"The *Grosser Carl*," he muttered, "out of Hamburg for New York. Next to no first-class, and she cuts rates for third and gets the bulk of the German emigrant traffic. She'll have six hundred on her this minute, and a hundred of a crew. Call it seven hundred all told, and there's hell waiting for them over yonder, and getting worse every minute. Oh, great James! I wonder what's going to be done. I couldn't pack seventy of them on the old *Flam* here, if I filled her to bursting."

He clapped the binoculars to his eyes again, and stared diligently round the rim of the night. If only he could catch a glimpse of some other liner hurrying along her route, then these people could be saved easily. He could drop his boats to take them till the other passenger ship came up. But the wide sea was empty of lights; the *Flamingo* and the *Grosser Carl* had the stage severely to themselves; and between them they had the making of an intolerable weight of destiny.

The second mate broke in upon his commander's brooding. "We shall have a nice bill for Lloyds this journey."

Kettle made no answer. He continued staring moodily at the spouting flames ahead. The second mate coughed. "Shall I be getting derricks rigged and the hatch covers off?"

Kettle turned on him with a sudden fierceness. "Do you know you're asking me to ruin myself?"

"But if we jettison cargo to make room for these poor beggars, sir, the insurance will pay."

"Pay your grandmother. You've got a lot to learn, my lad, before you're fit to take charge of a ship, if you don't know any more than that about the responsibility of the cargo."

"By Jove! that's awkward. Birds would look pretty blue if the bill was handed in to them."

"Birds!" said Kettle with contempt. "They aren't liable for sixpence. Supposing you were travelling by train, and there was some one else's portmanteau in the carriage, and you flung it out of the window into a river, who do you suppose would have to stand the racket?"

"Why, me. But then, sir, this is different."

"Not a bit. If we start in to jettison cargo, it means I'm a ruined man. Every ton that goes over the side I'll have to pay for."

"We can't leave those poor devils to frizzle," said the second mate awkwardly.

"Oh, no, of course we can't. They're a pack of unclean Dutchmen we never saw before, and should think ourselves too good to brush against if we met them in the street, but sentiment demands that we stay and pull them out of their mess, and cold necessity leaves me to foot the bill. You're young, and you're not married, my lad. I'm neither. I've worked like a horse all my life, mostly with bad luck. Lately luck's turned a bit. I've been able to make a trifle more, and save a few pounds out of my billets. And here and there, what with salvage and other things, I've come in the way of a plum. One way and another I've got nearly enough put by at home this minute to keep the missis and me and the girls to windward of the workhouse, even if I lost this present job with Birds, and didn't find another."

"Perhaps somebody else will pay for the cargo we have to put over the side, sir."

"It's pretty thin comfort when you've got a 'perhaps' of that size, and no other mortal stop between

you and the workhouse. It's all very well doing these things in hot blood; but the reckoning's paid when you're cold, and they're cold, and with the Board of Trade standing-by like the devil in the background all ready to give you a kick when there's a spare place for a fresh foot." He slammed down the handle of the bridge-telegraph, and rang off the *Flamingo*'s engines. He had been measuring distances all this time with his eye.

"But, of course, there's no other choice about the matter. There's the blessed cause of humanity to be looked after—humanity to these blessed Dutch emigrants that their own country doesn't want, and every other country would rather be without. Humanity to my poor old missis and the kids doesn't count. I shall get a sludgy paragraph in the papers for the *Grosser Carl*, headed 'Gallant Rescue,' with all the facts put upside down, and twelve months later there'll be another paragraph about a 'case of pitiful destitution.' "

"Oh, I say, sir, it won't be as bad as all that. Birds will see you through."

"Birds will do a fat lot. Birds sent me to work up a connection in the Mexican Gulf, and I've done it, and they've raised my screw two pound a month after four years' service. I jettison the customers' cargo, and probably sha'n't be able to pay for half of it. Customers will get mad, and give their business to other lines which don't run foul of blazing emigrant packets."

"Birds would never dare to fire you out for that."

"Oh, Lord, no! They'd say: 'We don't like the way you've taken to wear your back hair, Captain. And, besides, we want younger blood amongst our

skippers. You'll find your check ready for you in the outer office. Mind the step!' "

"I'm awfully sorry, Skipper. If there's anything I can do, sir——"

Captain Kettle sighed, and looked drearily out at the blazing ship and the tumbled waste of sea on which she floated. But he felt that he had been showing weakness, and pulled himself together again smartly. "Yes, there is, my lad. I'm a disappointed man, and I've been talking a lot more than's dignified. You'll do me a real kindness if you'll forget all that's been said. Away with you on to the main deck, and get hatches off, and whip the top tier of that cargo over the side as fast as you can make the winches travel. If the old *Flamingo* is going to serve out free hospitality, by James! she shall do it full weight. By James! I'd give the beggars champagne and spring mattresses if I'd got 'em."

Meanwhile, those on the German emigrant steamer had seen the coming of the shabby little English trader with bumping hearts. Till then the crew, with (so to speak) their backs up against a wall, had fought the fire with diligence; but when the nearness of a potential rescuer was reported, they discovered for themselves at once that the fire was beyond control. They were joined by the stokehold gangs, and they made at once for the boats, overpowering any officer who happened to come between them and their desires. The limp, tottery, half-fed, wholly seasick emigrants they easily shoved aside, and these in their turn by sheer mass thrust back the small handful of first-class passengers, and away screamed out the davit tackles, as the boats were lowered full of madly frightened deck hands and grimy handlers of coal.

Panic had sapped every trace of their manhood. They had concern only for their own skins; for the miserables remaining on the *Grosser Carl* they had none. And if for a minute any of them permitted himself to think, he decided that in the Herr Gott's good time the English would send boats and fetch them off. The English had always a special gusto for this meddling rescue work.

However, it is easy to decide on lowering boats, but not always so easy to carry it into safe fact if you are mad with scare, and there is no one whom you will listen to to give the necessary simple orders. And, as a consequence, one boat, chiefly manned by the coal interest, swamped alongside before it could be shoved clear; the forward davit fall of another jammed, and let it dangle vertically up and down when the after fall overhauled; and only one boat got away clear.

The reception which this small cargo of worthies met with surprised them. They pulled with terrified haste to the *Flamingo*, got under her lee, and clung desperately to the line which was thrown to them. But to the rail above them came the man who expected to be ruined by this night's work, and the pearls of speech which fell from his lips went home through even their thick hides.

Captain Kettle, being human, had greatly needed some one during the last half-hour to ease his feelings on—though he was not the man to own up to such a weakness, even to himself—and the boat came neatly to supply his want. It was long enough since he had found occasion for such an outburst, but the perfection of his early training stood him in good stead then. Every biting insult in his vocabulary, every lashing word that is used upon

the seas, every gibe, national, personal, or professional, that a lifetime of hard language could teach, he poured out on that shivering boat's crew then.

They were Germans certainly, but being an English shipmaster, he had, of course, many a time sailed with a forecastle filled with their nationality, and had acquired the special art of adapting his abuse to the "Dutchman's" sensibilities, even as he had other harangues suited for Coolie or Dago mariners, or even for that rare sea-bird, the English sailorman. And as a final wind-up, after having made them writhe sufficiently, he ordered them to go back whence they came, and take a share in rescuing their fellows.

"Bud we shall trown," shouted back one speaker from the wildly jumping boat.

"Then drown, and be hanged to you," shouted Kettle. "I'm sure I don't care if you do. But I'm not going to have cowards like you dirtying my deck-planks." He cast off the line to which their boat rode under the steamer's heaving side. "You go and do your whack at getting the people off that packet, or, so help me James! none of you shall ever see your happy Dutchland again."

Meanwhile, so the irony of the fates ordered it, the two mates, each in charge of one of the *Flamingo*'s lifeboats, were commanding crews made up entirely of Germans and Scandinavians, and pluckier and more careful sailormen could not have been wished for. The work was dangerous, and required more than ordinary nerve and endurance and skill. A heavy sea ran, and from its crests a spindrift blew which cut the face like whips, and numbed all parts of the body with its chill. The boats were tossed about like playthings, and required constant bailing

to keep them from being waterlogged. But Kettle had brought the *Flamingo* to windward of the *Grosser Carl*, and each boat carried a line, so that the steam winches could help her with the return trips.

Getting a cargo was, however, the chief difficulty. All attempt at killing the fire was given up by this time. All vestige of order was swamped in unutterable panic. The people on board had given themselves up to wild, uncontrollable anarchy. If a boat had been brought alongside, they would have tumbled into her like sheep, till their numbers swamped her. They cursed the flames, cursed the sea, cursed their own brothers and sisters who jostled them. They were the sweepings from half-fed middle Europe, born with raw nerves; and under the sudden stress of danger, and the absence of some strong man to thrust discipline on them, they became practically maniacs. They were beyond speech, many of them. They yammered at the boats which came to their relief, with noises like those of scared beasts.

Now the *Flamingo*'s boats were officered by two cool, profane mates, who had no nerves themselves, and did not see the use of nerves in other people. Neither of them spoke German, but (after the style of their island) presuming that some of those who listened would understand English, they made proclamation in their own tongue to the effect that the women were to be taken off first.

"Kids with them," added the second mate.

"And if any of you rats of men shove your way down here," said the chief mate, "before all the skirt is ferried across, you'll get knocked on the head, that's all. Savvy that belaying-pin I got in

my fist? Now then, get some bowlines, and sway out the ladies."

As well might the order have been addressed to a flock of sheep. They heard what was said in an agonized silence. Then each poor soul there stretched out his arms or hers, and clamored to be saved—and—never mind the rest. And meanwhile the flames bit deeper and deeper into the fabric of the steamer, and the breath of them grew more searching, as the roaring gale blew them into strength.

"You ruddy Dutchmen," shouted the second mate. "It would serve you blooming well right if you were left to be frizzled up into one big sausage stew together. However, we'll see if kindness can't tame you a bit yet." He waited till the swirl of a sea swung his boat under one of the dangling davit falls, and caught hold of it, and climbed nimbly on board. Then he proceeded to clear a space by the primitive method of crashing his fist into every face within reach.

"Now then," he shouted, "if there are any sailormen here worth their salt, let them come and help. Am I to break up the whole of this ship's company by myself?"

Gradually, by ones and twos, the *Grosser Carl*'s remaining officers and deck hands came shamefacedly toward this new nucleus of authority and order, and then the real work began. The emigrants, with sea sights and sea usage new to them, were still full of the unreasoning panic of cattle, and like cattle they were herded and handled, and their women and young cut out from the general mob. These last were got into the swaying, dancing boats as tenderly as might be, and the men were bidden to watch,

and wait their turn. When they grew restive, as the scorching fire drew more near, they were beaten savagely; the *Grosser Carl's* crew, with the shame of their own panic still raw on them, knew no mercy; and the second mate of the *Flamingo*, who stood against a davit, insulted them all with impartial cheerfulness. He was a very apt pupil, this young man, of that master of ruling men at the expense of their feelings, Captain Owen Kettle.

Meanwhile the two lifeboats took one risky journey after another, being drawn up to their own ship by a chattering winch, discharging their draggled freight with dexterity and little ceremony, and then laboring back under oars for another. The light of the burning steamer turned a great sphere of night into day, and the heat from her made the sweat pour down the faces of the toiling men, though the gale still roared, and the icy spindrift still whipped and stung. On the *Flamingo*, Captain Kettle cast into the sea with a free hand what represented the savings of a lifetime, provision for his wife and children, and an old-age pension for himself.

The *Grosser Carl* had carried thirty first-class passengers, and these were crammed into the *Flamingo's* slender cabin accommodation, filling it to overflowing. The emigrants—Austrians, Bohemians, wild Poles, filthy, crawling Russian Jews, bestial Armenians, human *debris* which even soldier-coveting Middle Europe rejected—these were herded down into the holds, as rich cargo was dug out by the straining winches, and given to the thankless sea to make space for them.

"Kindly walk up," said Kettle, with bitter hospitality, as fresh flocks of them were heaved up over

the bulwarks. "Don't hesitate to grumble if the accommodation isn't exactly to your liking. We're most pleased to strike out cargo to provide you with an elegant parlor, and what's left I'm sure you'll be able to sit on and spoil. Oh, you filthy, long-haired cattle! Did none of you ever wash?"

Fiercely the *Grosser Carl* burned to the fanning of the gale, and like furies worked the men in the boats. The *Grosser Carl's* own boat joined the other two, once the ferrying was well under way. She had hung alongside after Kettle cast off her line, with her people madly clamoring to be taken on board; but as all they received for their pains was abuse and coal-lumps—mostly, by the way, from their own fellow-countrymen, who made up the majority of the *Flamingo's* crew—they were presently driven to help in the salving work through sheer scare at being left behind to drown unless they carried out the fierce little English Captain's orders.

The *Flamingo's* chief mate oversaw the dangerous ferrying, and though every soul that was transshipped might be said to have had ten narrow escapes in transit over that piece of tossing water, luck and good seamanship carried the day, and none was lost. And on the *Grosser Carl* the second mate, a stronger man, brazenly took entire command, and commended to the nether gods all who suggested ousting him from that position. "I don't care a red what your official post was on this ship before I came," said the second mate to several indignant officers. "You should have held on to it when you had it. I've never been a skipper before, but I'm skipper here now by sheer right of conquest, and I'm going to stay on at that till the blooming old

ship's burnt out. If you bother me, I'll knock your silly nose into your watch-pocket. Turn-to there and pass down another batch of those squalling passengers into the boats. Don't you spill any of them overboard either, or, by the Big Mischief, I'll just step down and teach you handiness."

The second mate was almost fainting with the heat before he left the *Grosser Carl*, but he insisted on being the last man on board, and then guyed the whole performance with caustic gayety when he was dragged out of the water, into which he had been forced to jump, and was set to drain on the floor gratings of a boat.

The *Grosser Carl* had fallen away before the wind, and was spouting flame from stem-head to poop-staff by the time the last of the rescuers and the rescued were put on the *Flamingo's* deck, and on that travel-worn steamboat were some six hundred and fifty visitors that somehow or other had to be provided for.

The detail of famine now became of next importance. They were still five days' steam away from port, and their official provision supply was only calculated to last the *Flamingos* themselves for a little over that time. Things are cut pretty fine in these days of steam voyages to scheduled time. So there was no sentimental waiting to see the *Grosser Carl* finally burn out and sink. The boats were cast adrift, as the crews were too exhausted to hoist them in, and the *Flamingo's* nose was turned toward Liverpool. Pratt, the chief engineer, figured out to half a ton what coal he had remaining, and set the pace so as to run in with empty bunkers. They were cool now, all hands, from the excitement of the burning ship, and the objection-

able prospect of semi-starvation made them regard their visitors less than ever in the light of men and brothers.

But, as it chanced, toward the evening of next day, a hurrying ocean greyhound overtook them in her race from New York toward the East, and the bunting talked out long sentences in the commercial code from the wire span between the *Flamingo*'s masts. Fresh quartettes of flags flicked up on both steamers, were acknowledged, and were replaced by others; and when the liner drew up alongside, and stopped with reversed propellers, she had a loaded boat ready swung out in davits, which dropped in the water the moment she had lost her way. The bunting had told the pith of the tale.

When the two steamers' bridges were level, the liner's captain touched his cap, and a crowd of well-dressed passengers below him listened wonderingly. "Afternoon, Captain. Got 'em all?"

"Afternoon, Captain. Oh, we didn't lose any. But a few drowned their silly selves before we started to shepherd them."

"What ship was it? The French boat would be hardly due yet."

"No, the old *Grosser Carl.* She was astern of her time. Much obliged to you for the grub, Captain. We'd have been pretty hard pushed if we hadn't met you. I'm sending you a payment order. Sorry for spoiling your passage."

The liner captain looked at his watch.

"Can't be helped. It's in a good cause, I suppose, though the mischief of it is we were trying to pull down the record by an hour or so. The boat, there! Are you going to be all night with that bit of stuff?"

The cases of food were transshipped with frantic haste, and the boat returned. The greyhound leaped out into her stride again the moment she had hooked on, and shot ahead, dipping a smart blue ensign in salute. The *Flamingo* dipped a dirty red ensign and followed, and, before dark fell, once more had the ocean to herself.

The voyage home was not one of oppressive gayety. The first-class passengers, who were crammed into the narrow cabin found the quarters uncomfortable, and the little shipmaster's manner repellent. Urged by the precedent in such matters, they "made a purse" for him, and a presentation address. But as they merely collected some thirty-one pounds in paper promises, which, so far, have never been paid, their gratitude may be said to have had its economical side.

To the riffraff in the hold, for whose accommodation a poor man's fortune had been jettisoned, the thing "gratitude" was an unknown emotion. They plotted mischief amongst themselves, stole when the opportunity came to them, were unspeakably foul in their habits, and, when they gave the matter any consideration at all, decided that this fierce little captain with the red torpedo beard had taken them on board merely to fulfil some selfish purpose of his own. To the theorist who has sampled them only from a distance, these off-scourings of Middle Europe are downtrodden people with souls; to those who happen to know them personally, all their qualities seem to be conspicuously negative.

The *Flamingo* picked up the landmarks of the Southern Irish coast, and made her number to Lloyd's station on Brow Head, stood across for the Tuskar, and so on up St. George's Channel for Holy-

head. She flew a pilot jack there, and off Point Lynus picked up a pilot, who, after the custom of his class, stepped up over the side with a hard felt hat on his head, and a complete wardrobe, and a selection of daily papers in his pocket.

"Well, pilot, what's the news?" said Kettle, as the man of narrow waters swung himself up on to the bridge, and his boat swirled away astern.

"You are," said the pilot. "The papers are just full of you, Captain, all of them, from the *Shipping Telegraph* to the London *Times*. The Cunard boat brought in the yarn. A pilot out of my schooner took her up."

"How do they spell the name? Cuttle?"

"Well, I think it's 'Kattle' mostly, though one paper has it 'Kelly.' "

"Curse their cheek," said the little sailor, flushing. "I'd like to get hold of some of those blowsy editors that come smelling round the dock after yarns and drink, and wring their necks."

"Starboard a point," said the pilot, and when the quartermaster at the wheel had duly repeated the course, he turned to Kettle with some amusement. "Blowsy or not, they don't seem to have done you much harm this journey, Captain. Why, they're getting up subscriptions for you all round. Shouldn't wonder but what the Board of Trade even stands you a pair of binoculars."

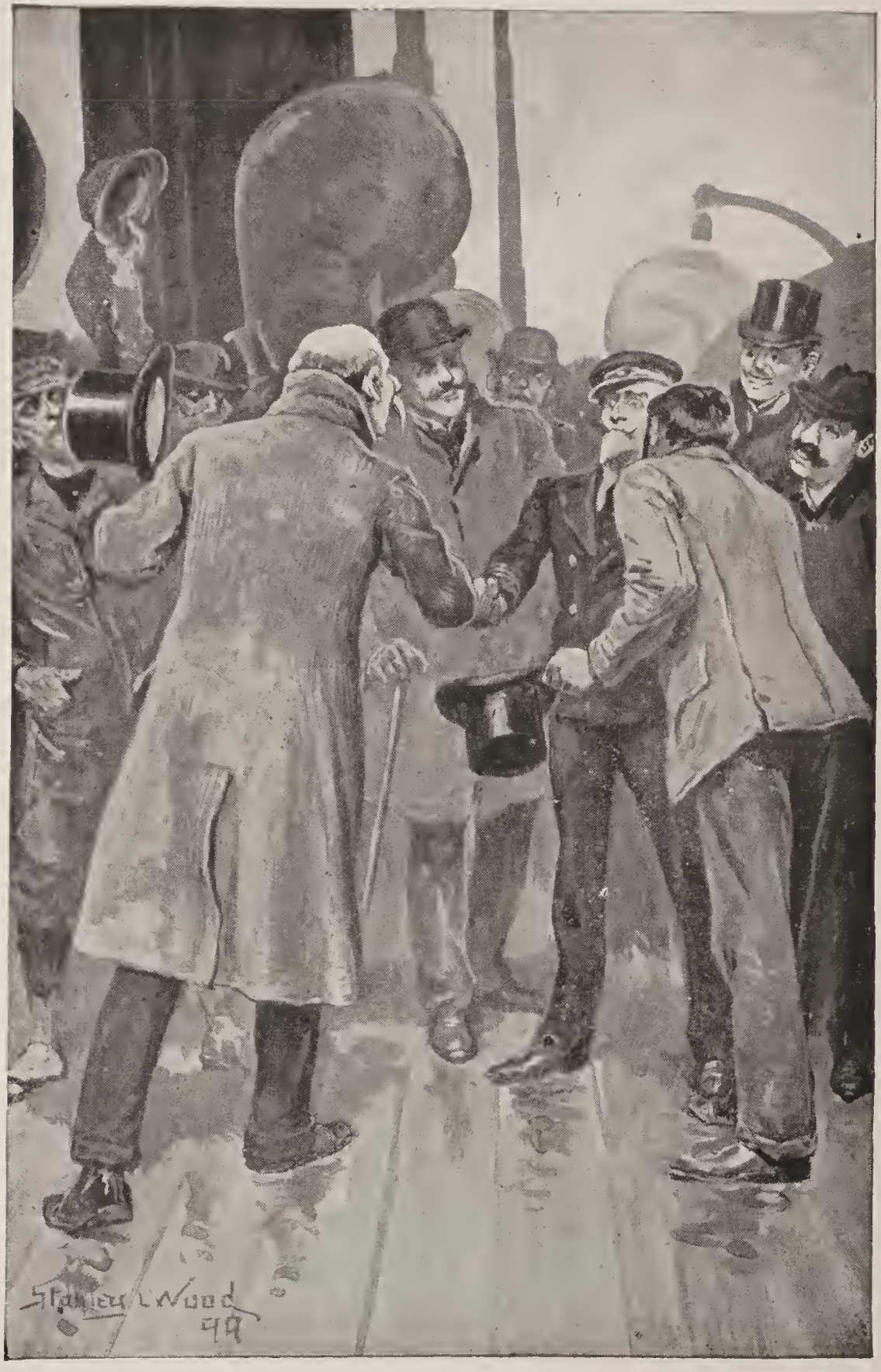
"I'm not a blessed mendicant," said Kettle stiffly, "and as for the Board of Trade, they can stick their binoculars up their trousers." He walked to the other end of the bridge, and stood there chewing savagely at the butt end of his cigar.

"Rum bloke," commented the pilot to himself, though aloud he offered no comment, being a man

whose business it was to keep on good terms with everybody. So he dropped his newspapers to one of the mates, and applied himself to the details of the pilotage.

Still, the pilot was right in saying that England was ringing with the news of Kettle's feat. The passengers of the Cunarder, with nothing much else to interest them, had come home thrilled and ringing with it. A smart New Yorker had got a "scoop" by slipping ashore at Queenstown and cabling a lavish account to the American Press Association, so that the first news reached London from the States. Followed Reuter's man and the Liverpool reporters on Prince's landing-stage, who came to glean copy as in the ordinary course of events, and they being spurred on by wires from London for full details, got down all the facts available, and imagined others. Parliament was not sitting, and there had been no newspaper sensation for a week, and, as a natural consequence, the papers came out next morning with accounts of the rescue varying from two columns to a page in length.

It is one of the most wonderful attributes of the modern Press that it can, at any time between midnight and publishing hours, collate and elaborate the biography of a man who hitherto has been entirely obscure, and considering the speed of the work, and the difficulties which hedge it in, these lightning life sketches are often surprisingly full of accuracies. But let the frillings in this case be fact or fiction, there was no doubt that Kettle and his crew had saved a shipload of panic-stricken foreign emigrants, and (to help point the moral) within the year, in an almost similar case,



STRANGERS CAME UP AND WRUNG KETTLE'S UNWILLING HAND.

[*Page* 309.

another shipload had been drowned through that same blind, helpless, hopeless panic. The pride of race bubbled through the British Daily Press in prosaic long primer and double-leaded bourgeois. There was no saying aloud, "We rejoice that an Englishman has done this thing, after having it proved to us that it was above the foreigner's strength." The newspaper man does not rhapsodize. But the sentiment was there all the same, and it was that which actuated the sudden wave of enthusiasm which thrilled the country.

The *Flamingo* was worked into dock, and a cheering crowd surged aboard of her in unrestrainable thousands. Strangers came up and wrung Kettle's unwilling hand, and dropped tears on his coat-sleeve; and when he swore at them, they only wept the more and smiled through the drops. It was magnificent, splendid, gorgeous. Here was a man! Who said that England would ever lose her proud place among the nations when she could still find men like Oliver Kelly—or Kattle—or Cuttle, or whatever this man was called, amongst her obscure merchant captains?

Even Mr. Isaac Bird, managing owner, caught some of the general enthusiasm, and withheld, for the present, the unpleasant remarks which occurred to him as suitable, touching Kettle's neglect of the firm's interest in favor of a parcel of bankrupt foreigners. But Kettle himself had the subject well in mind. When all this absurd fuss was over, then would come the reckoning; and whilst the crowd was cheering him, he was figuring out the value of the jettisoned cargo, and whilst pompous Mr. Isaac was shaking him by the hand and making a neat speech for the ear of casual reporters, poor Kettle

was conjuring up visions of the workhouse and pauper's corduroy.

But the Fates were moving now in a manner which was beyond his experience. The public, which had ignored his bare existence before for all of a lifetime, suddenly discovered that he was a hero, and that, too, without knowing half the facts. The Press, with its finger on the public's pulse, published Kettle literature in lavish columns. It gave twenty different "eye-witnesses' accounts" of the rescue. It gave long lists of "previous similar disasters." It drew long morals in leading articles. And finally, it took all the little man's affairs under its consideration, and settled them with a lordly hand.

"Who pays for the cargo Captain Kuttle threw overboard?" one paper headed an article; whilst another wrote perfervidly about "Cattle ruined for his bravery." Here was a new and striking side issue. Lloyds' were not responsible. Should the week's hero pay the bill himself out of his miserable savings? Certainly not. The owners of the *Grosser Carl* were the benefiting parties, and it was only just that they should take up the expense. So the entire Press wired off to the German firm, and next morning were able to publish a positive assurance that of course these grateful foreigners would reimburse all possible outlay.

The subject of finance once broached, it was naturally discovered that the hero toiled for a very meagre pittance, that he was getting on in years, and had a wife and family depending on him—and—promptly, there opened out the subscription lists. People were stirred, and they gave nicely, on the lower scale certainly, with shillings and guineas

predominating; but the lists totalled up to £2,400, which to some people, of course, is gilded affluence.

Now Captain Kettle had endured all this publicity with a good deal of restiveness, and had used language to one or two interviewers who managed to ferret him out, which fairly startled them; but this last move for a public subscription made him furious. He spoke in the captain's room of the hostelry he used, of the degradation which was put on him, and various other master mariners who were present entirely agreed with him. "I might be a blessed missionary, or India-with-a-famine, the way they're treating me," he complained bitterly. "If they call a meeting to give me anything, I'll chuck the money in their faces, and let them know straight what I think. By James! do they suppose I've got no pride? Why can't they let me alone? If the *Grosser Carl* people pay up for that cargo, that's all I want."

But the eternal healer, Time, soothed matters down wonderfully. Captain Owen Kettle's week's outing in the daily papers ran its course with due thrills and headlines, and then the Press forgot him, and rushed on to the next sensation. By the time the subscription list had closed and been brought together, the *Flamingo* had sailed for her next slow round trip in the Mexican Gulf, and when her captain returned to find a curt, formal letter from a firm of bankers, stating that £2,400 had been placed to his credit in their establishment, he would have been more than human if he had refused it. And, as a point of fact, after consulting with Madam, his wife, he transformed it into houses in that terrace of narrow dwellings in Birkenhead which represented the rest of his savings.

Now on paper this house property was alleged by

a sanguine agent to produce at the rate of £15 per annum apiece, and as there were thirty-six houses, this made an income—on paper—of well over £500 a year, the which is a very nice possession.

A thing, moreover, which Captain Kettle had prophesied had come to pass. The "trade connection" in the Mexican Gulf had been very seriously damaged. As was somewhat natural, the commercial gentry there did not relish having their valuable cargo pitched unceremoniously to Neptune, and preferred to send what they had by boats which did not contrive to meet burning emigrant liners. This, of course, was quite unreasonable of them, but one can only relate what happened.

And then the second part of the prophecy evolved itself naturally. Messrs. Bird discovered from the last indent handed them that more paint had been used over the *Flamingo's* fabric than they thought consistent with economy, and so they relieved Captain Kettle from the command, handed him their check for wages due—there was no commission to be added for such an unsatisfactory voyage as this last—and presented him gratis with their best wishes for his future welfare.

Kettle had thought of telling the truth in print, but the mysterious law of libel, which it is written that all mariners shall dread and never understand, scared him; and besides, he was still raw from his recent week's outing in the British Press. So he just went and gave his views to Mr. Isaac Bird personally and privately, threw the ink-bottle through the office window, pitched the box of business cigars into the fire, and generally pointed his remarks in a way that went straight to Mr. Bird's heart, and then prepared peacefully to take his departure.

"I shall not prosecute you for this——" said Mr. Isaac.

"I wish you dare. It would suit me finely to get into a police-court and be able to talk. I'd willingly pay my 'forty shillings and' for the chance. They'd give me the option fast enough."

"I say I shall not prosecute you because I have no time to bother with law. But I shall send your name round amongst the shipowners, and with my word against you, you'll never get another command so long as the world stands."

"You knock-kneed little Jew," said Kettle truculently, "do you think I'm giving myself the luxury of letting out at a shipowner, after knuckling down to the breed through all of a weary life, unless I knew my ground? I've done with ships and the sea for always, and if you give me any more of your lip, I'll burn your office down and you in it."

"You seem pleased enough with yourself about something," said Mr. Isaac.

"I am," said Kettle exultantly. "I've chucked the sea for good. I've taken a farm in Wharfedale, and I'm going to it this very week."

"Then," said Mr. Isaac sardonically, "if you've taken a farm, don't let me wish you any further ill. Good-morning."

But Kettle was not to be damped out of conceit with his life's desire by a few ill-natured words. He gave Mr. Isaac Bird his final blessing, commenting on his ancestors, his personal appearance, his prospects of final salvation, and then pleasantly took his leave. He was too much occupied in the preliminaries of his new life to have much leisure just then for further cultivation of the gentle art of insult.

The farm he had rented lay in the Wharfe Valley above Skipton, and, though its acreage was large, a good deal was made up of mere moorland sheep pasture. Luckily he recognized that a poetical taste for a rural life might not necessarily imply the whole mystery of stock rearing and agriculture, and so he hired a capable foreman as philosopher and guide. And here I may say that his hobby by no means ruined him, as might reasonably be expected; for in the worst years he never dropped more than fifty or sixty pounds, and frequently he ran the place without loss, or even at a profit.

But though it is hard to confess that a man's ideal comes short of his expectations when put to the trial, I am free to confess that although he enjoyed it all, Kettle was not at his happiest when he was attending his crops or his sheep, or haggling with his fellow farmers on Mondays over fat beasts in Skipton market.

He had gone back to one of his more practiced tastes—if one calls it a taste—the cultivation of religion. The farm stood bleak and lonely on the slope of a hillside, and on both flanks of the dale were other lonely farms as far as the eye could see. There was no village. The nearest place of worship was four miles away, and that was merely a church. But in the valley beside the Wharfe was a small gray stone chapel, reared during some bygone day for the devotions of some forgotten sect. Kettle got this into his control.

He was by no means a rich man. The row of houses in Birkenhead were for the most part tenanted by the wives of mercantile marine engineers and officers, who were chronically laggard with their rent, and whom *esprit de corps* forbade him

to press; and so, what with this deficit, and repairs and taxes, and one thing and another, it was rarely that half the projected £500 a year found its way into his banking account. But a tithe of whatever accrued to him was scrupulously set aside for the maintenance of the chapel.

He imported there the grim, narrow creed he had learned in South Shields, and threw open the door for congregations. He was entirely in earnest over it all, and vastly serious. Failing another minister, he himself took the services, and though, on occasion, some other brother was induced to preach, it was he himself who usually mounted the pulpit beneath the sounding-board. He purchased an American organ, and sent his eldest daughter weekly to take lessons in Skipton till she could play it. And Mrs. Kettle herself led the singing.

Still further, the chapel has its own collection of hymns, specially written, printed and dedicated to its service. The book is Captain Kettle's first published effort. Heaven and its author alone know under what wild circumstances most of those hymns were written.

The chapel started its new span of life with a congregation meagre enough, but Sunday by Sunday the number grew. They are mostly Nonconformists in the dales, and when once a man acquires a taste for dissent, he takes a sad delight in sampling his neighbors' variations of creed. Some came once and were not seen again. Others came and returned. They felt that this was the loneliest of all modern creeds; indeed, Kettle preached as much, and one can take a melancholy pride in splendid isolation.

I am not sure that Captain Kettle does not find

the restfulness of his present life a trifle too accentuated at times, though this is only inevitable for one who has been so much a man of action. But at any rate he never makes complaint. He is a strong man, and he governs himself even as he governs his family and the chapel circle, with a strong, just hand. The farm is a model of neatness and order; paint is lavished in a way that makes dalesmen lift their eyebrows; and the routine of the household is as strict as that of a ship.

The house is unique, too, in Wharfedale for the variety of its contents. Desperately poor though Kettle might be on many of his returns from his unsuccessful ventures, he never came back to his wife without some present from a foreign clime as a tangible proof of his remembrance, and because these were usually mere curiosities, without intrinsic value, they often evaded the pawn-shop in those years of dire distress, when more negotiable articles passed irretrievably away from the family possession. And with them too, in stiff, decorous frames, are those certificates and testimonials which a master mariner always collects, together with photographs of gratuitously small general interest.

But one might turn the house upside down without finding so carnal an instrument as a revolver, and when I suggested to Kettle once that we might go outside and have a little pistol practice, he glared at me, and I thought he would have sworn. However, he let me know stiffly enough that whatever circumstances might have made him at sea, he had always been a very different man ashore in England, and there the matter dropped.

But speaking of mementoes, there is one link with the past that Mrs. Kettle, poor woman, never ceases

to regret the loss of. "Such a beautiful gold watch," she says it was too, "with the Emperor's and the Captain's names engraved together on the back, and just a nice mention of the *Gross of Carl.*" As it happened, I saw the letter with which it was returned. It ran like this:—

To His Majesty the German Emperor,
Berlin, *S.S. "Flamingo,"*
Germany. *Liverpool.*

Sir,

I am in receipt of watch sent by your agent, the German ambassador in London, which I return herewith. It is not my custom to accept presents from people I don't know, especially if I have talked about them. I have talked about you, not liking several things you've done, especially telegraphing about Dr. Jameson. Sir, you should remember that man was down when you sent your wire and couldn't hit back. Some of the things I have said about German deck hands you needn't take too much notice about. They aren't so bad as they might be if properly handled. But they want handling. Likewise learning English.

My wife wants to keep your photo, so I send you one of hers in return, so there shall be no robbery. She has written her name over it, same as yours.

Yours truly,
O. Kettle (Master).

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